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ABSTRACT

Eight focus groups were interviewed to determine the current strengths and weaknesses of the Ramsey County Extension Service as well as the directions that the service should take in the future so as to meet the county's needs for extension education in urban and suburban settings. The focus groups included extension professionals and support staff, extension volunteers, current and potential users, and representatives of the county government and public and private agencies. The groups praised the extension service for its freedom from discrimination, good programs, good teaching methods, promptness in responding to user requests, up-to-date and informative materials, cross-cultural values, and opportunities for intergenerational learning. The groups suggested the following strategies for improving the program for the future: develop a marketing campaign to improve the program's image as an extension program for an urban county, open satellite offices in various locations to reach minority and inner-city residents, increase cooperative programming with area schools, place more emphasis on volunteer development and leadership development, redefine the clientele of the program's home study groups to focus primarily on middle- and retirement-aged homemakers, and develop programs focusing on urban families and youth. (Appendixes include explanations of the telephone and group interview procedures used during the study and a description of the membership of the individual study groups.) (MN)

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URBAN EXTENSION

A LOOK TO THE FUTURE

REPORT ON FOCUS GROUP SESSIONS

CONDUCTED JANUARY 22 - FEBRUARY 6, 1987

RAMSEY COUNTY EXTENSION SERVICE

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

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July 1987

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URBAN EXTENSION

A LOOK TO THE FUTURE

(Executive Summary)

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This project represents the contributions of many individuals. The individuals listed below provided advice, assistance with telephoning, transcribing tapes, and typing the final report, and encouragement and support. To each of the individuals listed below, we extend our special thanks for assisting us with a project that was proposed in December, 1986, implemented in January and February, and reported in July, 1987.

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We would like to thank Mary Ann Martin, and Centennial United Methodist Church, Roseville, Minnesota, for providing space to conduct the Focus Group interviews. The interview team also expresses appreciation to Ramsey County Parks and Recreation for providing space for a Focus Group interview session.

Two additional individuals warrant a special "Thank You" because they provided gifts to the participants in the focus group interviews. These items were provided on behalf of the Ramsey County Extension Committee as a way of expressing thanks to each of the 66 individuals who participated in the process. Keith Jacob donated 10 Christmas trees from his tree farm; a drawing was held at each session to determine the recipient of the tree. Dale Bacon obtained gift boxes of products from the 3M Company in Maplewood; each remaining interview participant received a 3M gift package. Financial support for refreshments and materials associated with the project was provided by the Ramsey County Extension office. We add our special appreciation for this contribution.

RAMSEY COUNTY EXTENSION SERVICE
FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW STUDY PROJECT

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

FOR THE MINNESOTA EXTENSION SERVICE:

(1) Fill vacant staff positions as expeditiously as possible.

(2) Recognize the need for and assist with the training of the volunteer staff in understanding the clustering concept and the need for agent specialization and the implications for the volunteer.

(3) Work with the Ramsey County Extension Service staff, the County Commissioners and the County Extension Committee in defining the mission and role of an urban extension education program in Ramsey County.

(4) Work with the Ramsey County Extension Service staff, and the County Extension Committee in resolving differences between state program priorities and the program priorities desired by the county residents, the County Extension Committee, and the County Commissioners.

(5) Provide state leadership and expertise in developing an image and identity for the Ramsey County Extension Service, and in promoting/publicizing/marketing the Ramsey County Extension Service program.

(6) Work with the Ramsey County Extension Service staff, the County Extension Committee, and the County Commissioners to ensure funding for (1) additional staff, (2) upgrading the facilities, (3) creating an awareness and image of the Extension Service in Ramsey County.

FOR THE COUNTY COMMISSIONERS:

(1) If cooperation among county agencies is desired in program delivery, determine strategies for recognizing the contributions of the contributing agencies (in both public recognition and funding).

(2) Develop with the Ramsey County Extension Service criteria for deciding when the Ramsey County Extension Service will provide the public education component of county programs and services (e.g., household solid waste management, volunteer leadership training and education), and when it will be provided by outside consultants, or by other county units.

(3) Work with the Minnesota Extension Service to fill vacant staff positions as expeditiously as possible.

(4) Work with the Ramsey County Extension Service staff, the County Extension Committee, and the Minnesota Extension Service to define the mission and role of an urban extension education program for Ramsey County.

(5) Work with the Ramsey County Extension Committee and Minnesota Extension Service to ensure funding for (1) additional staff, (2) upgrading the facilities, (3) creating an awareness and image of the Extension Service in Ramsey County.

(6) Assist county department personnel in getting to know one another for purposes of inter-agency programming.

(7) Assist in marketing Ramsey County Extension Service to local constituents.

(8) Provide leadership in working with the elected officials in the City of St. Paul to explore expanded programming and joint funding.

FOR THE RAMSEY COUNTY EXTENSION SERVICE:

(1) Engage a marketing/public relations consultant (alone or with the Minnesota Extension Service) to develop an image of the Ramsey County Extension Service as an educational program for an urban county provided by Ramsey County and Minnesota Extension Service.

(2) Open satellite offices with specific hours in the City of St. Paul and in other parts of Ramsey County to reach minority, inner city and city residents.

(3) Develop Joint Powers Agreement with the Community Education programs in all school districts in the county to address cooperative programming and program duplication.

(4) Arrange for the administrative services associated with Community Gardens to be transferred to another appropriate county agency, while retaining the Community Gardens horticulture educational component.

(5) Develop a marketing program (flyers, orientation sessions, individual conferences) to inform county, city and suburban government officials about the educational roles and resources that could be provided by the Ramsey County Extension Service.

(6) Include the area of Volunteer Development as a major program emphasis of the Ramsey County Extension Service.

(7) Include the area of Leadership Development as a major program emphasis of the Ramsey County Extension Service.

(8) Redefine the clientele of the Home Study Groups to focus on primarily the middle-age and retirement-age homemaker. Utilize other educational methods for reaching the young and full-time employed homemaker.

(9) Develop an Extension program for Ramsey County that focuses on education for urban families and youth, for volunteer development, and or leadership development based on issues/needs/problems of the audience. Extension should continue to offer those programs which it does well, and expand its efforts in cooperative programming with other agencies. A marketing plan should be developed to inform the general public and agency personnel of the opportunities for continuing education that are available through the Extension Service.

RAMSEY COUNTY EXTENSION SERVICE
FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW STUDY PROJECT

SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS

ASSESSMENT OF EXISTING PROGRAMS

Extensive positive and supportive comments were expressed in interviews regarding existing extension education programs (Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program, 4-H Youth Development, Master Gardeners and other Horticultural programs, Home Study Groups, and Home Economics consumer information)

IMAGE AND IDENTITY

1. * The Ramsey County Extension Service needs to focus on improving its external image.

   * The Ramsey County Extension Service and staff often does not receive recognition for its role and contribution in cooperative programming with other public and private agencies.
   General public (potential users) are not aware of Extension or are confused as to what is Community Education, what are Continuing Education and Extension classes, and what is St. Paul Campus.
   * If there is an image of Extension among the general public, it is viewed as "rural" and not applicable for urban people. (The rural image is accentuated by the barn, the County Fair, and the experiences of growing up in rural area.)
   * The current facilities are seen as outdated, inadequate and cold.
   * Media people are still calling the program "Agricultural" Extension Service.
   * Agency personnel are unsure how to access Extension (this was emphasized many times).
   * 4-H is the best known Extension program.
   * People say they can't find Extension in the phone book.
   * Among users and Extension volunteers, the image is "segmented" (users tend to know about only segments of the total program).
   * Several county representatives involved in the interviews had limited knowledge about the Extension Service and its education programs.

2. * The Ramsey County Extension Service needs to focus on how to handle the dilemma of a desired increased visibility and serving urban needs, and a currently over-extend[illegible] professional and support staff working with established programs, w[illegible] are valued by the clientele served.

   1. * Current programs (EFNEP, Master Gardeners, Home Study Group programs, 4-H and ANSWER-U) are valued by users and volunteers.
   2. * Potential users identified issues requiring educational programs related to health and wellness, the environment, family living, and leadership development, and under-served families with marginal income and services, single parents and older adults.

3. * Even with a "non-image" among the general public, the 8 professional and 5 office support staff are seen by users and volunteers as very busy, if not over-extended.
4. * The staff is viewed as being effective in reaching low income audiences (but this requires high ratio of staff to clientele served).
5. * Agencies view this cooperative programming and networking as being very important, expressing need for expansion of this effort.
6. * Extension has been excluded from providing the educational component of county government programs serving needs of county residents (e.g. household solid waste management and volunteer leadership training).
7. * The staff has cooperated with other agencies in providing programs (but this requires large amounts of time and often provides little or no recognition nor identity).
8. * Methods to reach mass audiences have been used (including cable TV, print media, newsletters, video tapes) and should be expanded.

STAFFING

1. * The Ramsey County Extension Service needs to focus on some staffing concerns.

    1. * Delays in filling vacant positions (e.g. Horticulture and 4-H) cause damage to the programs.
    2. * Ethnic staff members are essential for working with low income adults and youth in ethnic groups as role models and bilingual interpreters.
    3. * The clustering agent specialization concept is acceptable to staff members **IF** it alleviates duplication and results in fewer subject matter areas in which the agent is to specialize.
    4. * The present professional and support staff enjoys a very positive image among the public; they are seen as competent, friendly, hardworking and over-extended.

2. * Volunteer development and support by staff have effectively extended the professional staff in terms of program delivery.

    1. * Partial staffing (e.g. ANSWER-U) creates frustration and dissatisfaction with Ramsey County Extension Service among users when program assistance is available only at limited times.
    2. * Volunteer staff are very concerned about the cluster agent concept; they feel that they will not have access to particular staff members when needed. The relationships that volunteers develop with staff are particularly valued and can be critical in volunteer retention.

3. * The Ramsey County Extension Service needs to focus on how to handle the dilemma of meeting increased programming expectations and requests from a diversified clientele while concurrently meeting emerging county needs with increasing competition for volunteers with staff time required for recruitment, development and support of volunteers.

4. * The Ramsey County Extension Service needs to focus on volunteer development as a priority goal.

    1. * Volunteers presently effectively extend the efforts of the professional and support staff.
    2. * Volunteers <u>really</u> value the knowledge and skill they have obtained from Ramsey County Extension Service and the opportunity to share their expertise.
    3. * Extension volunteers expect on-going training and staff support from the organization.
    4. * Extension volunteers need to know how to differentiate between education and direct service.

PROGRAM FOCUS

* The Ramsey County Extension Service needs to focus on how to handle the dilemma of its tradition and experience in addressing the needs of the county's people, and the necessity and the need to compete successfully for funds (which are provided for cost-effective, high priority and visible programs).

    1. * The Ramsey County Extension staff has to focus on education rather than direct service (the Community Gardens project is now primarily a service) and potential cooperating agencies may have to recognize there are educational roles that Ramsey County Extension Service could play (e.g. household solid waste management, leadership development).
    2. * The Ramsey County Extension Service needs to determine what it does that is unique and what it does well, and address what it can no longer provide.
    3. * The connection with the Minnesota Extension Service program and with University of Minnesota resources is valued (when recognized) and needs to be continued.
    4. * The Ramsey County Extension Service should focus more on low to middle-income persons/families which are under served or fail to qualify for public or private social services (minority and low-income persons are currently being served through EFNEP and 4-H).
    5. * Cooperation with other agencies would be welcome and should be expanded although agencies may be uncertain how to utilize the expertise of the Ramsey County Extension Service. The dilemma of how to receive recognition for each agency when cooperative programs are offered needs to be resolved, and potential cooperating agencies may have to recognize there are educational roles that Ramsey County Extension Service could play (e.g. household solid waste management, leadership development).
    6. * Agency personnel foresee an expansion in cooperating programs among agencies in the future.
    7. * The Ramsey County Extension Service needs to resolve or handle the dilemma of how to expand educational programs for low-income and minority audiences without growth in the numbers of para-professional, faculty and office support staff.

PROGRAM RELEVANCE - PERCEIVED PROGRAM NEEDS

* When asked to respond to the general issues addressed by the Minnesota Extension Service, people found it easier to relate to:

  Human Development (how to cope with a rapidly changing social and economic structure that puts new stresses on family relationships, new demands on youth and their parents, and new concerns for the well-being of the elderly).
  Community Leadership (How to help people develop community leadership skills for the complex society of tomorrow).
  Environment and Natural Resources (management of natural resources and economic activity specific to conservation, environmental issues and waste disposal).

* People had most difficulty relating to **Economic Development** (how to improve the agricultural system and other related areas of economic development specifically in agriculture, horticulture, energy production, fisheries, forestry, recreation, rural business and tourism).
  * The Ramsey County Extension Service needs an urban image and identity separate from that of rural Minnesota.
  * The Ramsey County Extension Service needs to develop its own image as an educational agency that is associated with but not subsumed by the University of Minnesota.
  * The Ramsey County Extension Service needs to define the mission of an urban Extension Service within the framework of the Minnesota Extension Service, county government and the needs of the county residents.

* Ramsey County Extension Service needs to continue teaching youth and adults:
  * basic family living and life management skills
  * leadership development in all of its aspects
  * effective decision-making for
    - being a citizen
    - and for living in a changing urban environment

* The study project team members were told that Ramsey County Extension Service needs to focus its educational programs on (not listed in priority):
  * Leadership development education
  * Basic home and family living skills, especially for young families, non-traditional families and the aging
  * Programs for low-income people
  * Prevention education to enable health, fitness and wellness
  * Youth development to deal with social development, and home and life management skills
  * Urban environmental issues including -
    - solid waste management
    - clean water
    - clean air
* Consumer information and education

INTRODUCTION

An interest in how the Ramsey County Extension Service can make a unique educational contribution to the citizens in an urban county in the future prompted this effort to listen to county citizens and government and representatives discuss their concerns.

The Ramsey County Extension Service with a tradition of providing educational programs related to Home Economics/Family Living; Agriculture; 4-H Youth Development and Community Resource Development for over 70 years -- was wisely questioning where it could make the greatest contribution in a changing urban environment with their present staff and resources.

Each of the three partners in the Cooperative Extension Service "partnership" -- the Ramsey County Board of Commissioners, the Minnesota Extension Service, and the Ramsey County Extension Committee -- desired information about specific concerns.

The Ramsey County Board of Commissioners, faced with the allocation of scarce public resources, was concerned about program visibility and focus. While the approximate $200,000 allocation from Ramsey County funds represents less than one percent of the total county budget, there are many needs competing for county tax dollars in an urban/suburban area.

The Minnesota Extension Service of the University of Minnesota, through strategic planning efforts, had proposed structural changes and an increasing programming emphasis on "issues" for the future. One result of these changes was the creation of a new position of County Extension Director for Ramsey County; applicants were interviewed while the study was underway.

The topics of concern included:

1. The perceived image of the Ramsey County Extension Service

2. The relevance and appropriateness of current programming

3. Staffing issues

DESCRIPTION OF FOCUS GROUP PROCESS

Richard A. Krueger, (1985) University of Minnesota, in Focus Group Interviewing: Step by Step Instructions for Extension Workers describes the focus group interview process:

> Focus group interviews are organized group discussions which are focused around a single theme. A typical interview consists of a series of group interviews, usually a minimum of three different groups and each group consisting of eight to ten people. The moderator/discussion leader introduces the topic of concern and then follows a predetermined questioning route. The group discusses the questions and shares insights and ideas. The

moderator is careful to probe and seek additional clarification of certain responses. The entire group interview usually lasts less than two hours. The discussion is typically audio tape recorded and used with moderator notes for later, more careful analysis. The responses in each interview are then compared and attention is placed on identification of patterns of responses among the various groups.

Krueger (1985) observes the group interview process works well because it taps into the key aspects of individual decision-making and the dynamics of the group process. People usually do not make decisions in isolation, but rather after listening, discussing and sharing concerns with others.

Focus group interviews can be described to be sharply different from other group experiences such as planning committees, advisory groups and task forces.

Focus group interviews are a means of getting information. The function of the group is to provide that information and not to plan, vote or advise.

Emphasis is not on consensus but on the diversity and range of opinions of individuals within the group.

To accomplish this task, the following are essential: careful selection of participants, development and pilot testing of interview questions and interview route, a skilled moderator, and a healthy respect for the limitations of the focus interview tool.

METHODOLOGY

THE PROCESS

A study utilizing Focus Group Interviews was requested by County Extension Committee members and County Commissioners.

County Extension Director, Catherine A. Nelson sought expertise on Focus Group Method from the University of Minnesota. With Nelson's impending resignation from the Ramsey County Extension Director's role, Shirley Barber was asked to coordinate the project in the Ramsey County Extension Office.

Dr. Harlan Copeland, Associate Professor, Graduate Program in Adult Education, University of Minnesota, accepted the assignment as consultant to the Ramsey County Extension Focus Group Interview study project.

TIMETABLE

December 30, 1986
Following acceptance of the project assignment, Copeland and Barber met to discuss their understanding of expectations of the Focus Group Interview process and the request to have Focus Group Interviews conducted at this time of impending organization administrative change and restructuring. The discussion determined:

- a tentative time table dependent on the consultant's availability for the duration of the project.
- how the Focus Group Interview sessions would be conducted with Copeland facilitating each of 8 sessions and Barber recording each session with notetaking and audiotaping each session for verbatim transcription of audiotapes.
- the origination of the request and feasibility of interviewing project stakeholders who were determined to be -

  1. Members of the Board of County Commissioners
  2. Representatives of the County Extension Committee, and
  3. Minnesota Extension Service administrators who related directly to the Ramsey County Extension Service.

Furthermore, suggestions would be sought regarding who should participate in the Focus Group Interviews, what questions should be asked, and timing of the interviews.

January 5, 1987
The project team met with three Ramsey County Extension sub-committee members to identify information desired by the committee.

January 7, 1987
The project team visited with the chairman of the Ramsey County Board of Commissioners to obtain her ideas about what information should be collected. She further suggested visits with the two County Commissioners on the Extension Committee.

January 9, 1987
The project team discussed the project with Commissioner Hal Norgard, County Extension Committee member and received his suggestions.
(It should be noted Commissioner Ruby Hunt was unavailable at this time due to responsibilities with the legislative session.)

January 13, 1987
The project team met with the Ramsey County Extension Committee as a whole to outline project progress and projected goals. Themes emerging for Focus Group Interview questions were shared in 6 issue areas.

1. Program Focus - determining relevance and appropriateness of current programs and directions for the future.
2. Image and presence of Extension in the county - both internal and external, including facilities and location.
3. Restructuring - Ramsey County Extension Service and its role and relationship in the Minnesota Extension Service restructuring plan.
4. Staffing - and sharing (clustering) in the urban metropolitan setting.
5. Funding - cost effectiveness and funding partnerships.
6. Uniquenesses - what Extension does best and identification of potential duplication.

The general project outline was approved and both "narrow" and "broad" questions were deemed appropriate for examining the 6 issue areas.

The project team reaffirmed committee consensus that timing of the project was not a key issue, but should be completed as soon as feasible to provide some information for the newly restructured County Extension Director role.

It was approved that the project team conduct interviews with

1. Ramsey County Extension Service professional and support staff
2. users (volunteers and agency representatives)
3. potential users/non-users

The project team leaders met January 12, 1987 with Marsha Mueller, Evaluation Specialist, MINNESOTA EXTENSION SERVICE, for advice and counsel. Mueller has extensive experience in the use of focus group interviews as an evaluation method.

Late January - Early February, 1987
Eight Focus Group Interview sessions were conducted over a two-week period.

February, 1987
Audio tapes were transcribed to verbatim transcripts.

March-July, 1987
Transcripts reviewed for preparing the final report.

SELECTION OF GROUP PARTICIPANTS

Recommendations for Focus Group Interview participants were requested from County Commissioners, County Extension Committee members and Ramsey County Extension staff members.

Recognizing the greatest recruitment effort would likely be needed for non-users/potential users, particular emphasis was given to this category. While random dialing was recognized as an ideal method for securing non-users, it was deemed too time intensive. Thus, suggestions of names for Extension non-users were used to identify this sub-group of participants.

Barber telephoned all potential Focus Group Interview participants with the exception of Horticulture program representatives who were called by the Horticulture program secretary.

CRITERIA FOR SELECTING FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW MEETING PLACES

It was determined by the project team leaders that Focus Group Interview meeting site selection meet the following criteria:

1. No sessions should be held at the Ramsey County Extension Service office as it may not be viewed as a neutral site and was too noisy for audio tape recording.
2. Churches might be feasible if easy to find by participants and the site allowed simple refreshments to be served (there may be a user fee).
3. Community settings would need to have allowance for food to be served on site.
4. Restaurants with a private room needed sound control for audio tape recording, (but may be cost prohibitive).

GROUP PARTICIPANTS

The eight Focus Groups included 1 group of current Extension professional and support staff, 2 groups of current Extension volunteers and users, 2 groups of public and private agency and county government representatives, 2 groups of Extension non-users/potential users, and 1 mixed group including current Extension users and agency representatives. Ages ranged from that of a recent 4-H graduate to retirees.

Group Participation. All potential participants were called 2 to 7 days prior to the actual group session in which they participated. It should be noted the majority accepted immediately, with enthusiasm, the opportunity to participate. Several changed other appointments on their schedules in order to participate.

Non-participation. Of the persons called, 3 current Extension users declined due to schedule conflicts, after making an effort to attend an alternate session.

Two potential users (non-users) declined participation -- one for lack of transportation and not desiring a ride when offered and one who indicated being shy about speaking up in a group setting.

One private agency declined with the representative citing the reason of being "too extended in the community."

One public service agency representative took the participation request message but failed to return the call.

Inclement weather prevented 2 from participation. One person had a driving mishap enroute to the session and left immediately after arriving. Three persons arrived late to sessions.

Group Composition by Sex. Sixty-six (66) individuals participated in the 8 groups including 18 males and 48 females.

Group 1	1 male	7 females	8 total
Group 2	1 male	8 females	9 total
Group 3	3 males	4 females	7 total
Group 4	3 males	4 females	7 total
Group 5	0 males	8 females	8 total
Group 6	4 males	6 females	10 total
Group 7	2 males	5 females	7 total
Group 8	4 males	6 females	10 total
	18 males	48 females	66 total

DATA COLLECTION PROCESS

Focus Group Interview sessions were held at sites that met the criteria for selection. The first group met at the Ramsey County Parks and Recreation Department, Maplewood. The seven remaining groups met at Centennial United Methodist Church, Roseville. Rides were coordinated and provided for those requesting this assistance.

Each session was planned for 60 to 90 minutes. Light refreshments with beverage and a snack were provided at each session.

Each participant came to the session knowing the session would be audio taped and that facilitators would be taking notes during the session. Participants were informed that confidentiality of individual responses would be protected in the final written report.

The group facilitator asked for self-introductions at the beginning of each session. Table name cards were in place as participants arrived.

At the conclusion of each session, complimentary gifts were distributed including a drawing for a Christmas tree (to be provided in November with notification); a gift package provided by the 3M corporation, and a sample packet of Extension education publications.

DATA ANALYSIS PROCESS

Following the Focus Group Interview sessions, the audio tapes were transcribed into verbatim transcripts.

The Ramsey County Extension office secretaries and staff spent 107 hours transcribing the audio tapes.

The verbatim transcript data and notes were analyzed for general themes such as image and identity, assessment of existing programs and programming issues for the future, program focus, and staffing considerations. These themes were subsequently examined for sub-points.

PRELIMINARY REPORTS PREPARED

Project team leaders prepared and presented preliminary summary reports, both written and oral, for the County Extension Committee and Minnesota Extension Service Executive Administrative Committee.

FINAL REPORT PREPARED

Project team leaders further reviewed transcript data and synthesized preliminary reports previously prepared for final recommendations and conclusions in this report.

The report is presented in three ways: (1) An Executive Summary of the recommendations and findings, (2) The detailed findings and conclusions (which can be skimmed using the bold type face in the Findings section of the report) and (3) The detailed evidence (i.e., the observations and opinions) provided by the participants which is indented in the Findings section.

The participants' quotations were reported verbatim if at all possible. Minor editing was used to reduce the length of the statement if appropriate. Care was exercised to avoid altering the intended meaning of the participant.

FINDINGS

ASSESSMENT OF EXISTING PROGRAMS

The Ramsey County Extension Service staff and its programs have been available to the residents of Ramsey County since about 1914. Educational programs in the early years emphasized agricultural production, home economics for the rural homemaker, and 4-H for the rural youth. As Ramsey County became more urban and suburban, the needs and interests of residents in out-of-school, lifelong education have changed. Currently, the mission of the Ramsey County Extension Service is to provide educational programs for adults and youth in four general areas: (1) economic development; (2) environmental and natural resources; (3) human development; and (4) community leadership. The major program thrusts of the Ramsey County Extension Service at the time the focus group interviews were conducted were: (1) Horticulture/Agriculture Related; (2) Home Study Groups; (3) Home Economics Consumer Education; (4) Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program [EFNEP]; (5) 4-H Youth Development, and (6) Outreach Home Economics.

Volunteer development and leadership development activities have also received considerable attention by the staff but primarily as means for achieving other program goals rather than as ends in themselves.

A general assessment of the Extension program offerings by program participants, volunteer staff, and representatives of agencies was desired. [Potential users who were not familiar with the Extension Service were asked questions about the need for future programs rather than their evaluation of current programs.]

The questions asked of the focus group interview participants were:

1. What do you feel that the Ramsey County Extension Service is GOOD at doing?
2. What do you feel is UNIQUE about the Ramsey County Extension Service?
3. As we think about the future, are the educational programs provided by the Ramsey County Extension Service RELEVANT and APPROPRIATE to the residents of Ramsey County in both the urban and suburban areas?

Questions were not asked about specific programs; volunteer leaders and/or program participants from each of the six major programs participated in the interview discussions.

PERCEPTIONS OF THE RAMSEY COUNTY EXTENSION SERVICE PROGRAMS IN GENERAL

WHAT RAMSEY COUNTY EXTENSION IS GOOD AT DOING. Participants cited accessibility to the programs as one of the strengths of the Ramsey County Extension Service:

> [Extension] is very good at reaching a lot of people.
>
> There's no discrimination.

One of the things that you do well is to provide services to people across all ages...And income levels. That is something that is rare in many ways in terms of agencies right now.

[Extension] is available to everyone no matter what your education, or what your background is.

It's just a telephone call away...they're just ready to help you if they can.

[Extension] can be done over the phone...you can reach everyone, a phone call's free...you don't have to get into your car and drive [somewhere].

Others said that Extension was good at providing programs --

[Extension is] good at [providing] a very diverse program, all different kinds of programs.

They do a good job of organizing for the programs.

If you see a need in your program for change, they're very open to looking at areas of change and changing things as the needs of the clientele change.

Yes, there's no question about it that Extension produces results. Back in '64 when I first got married, I found out that the Extension Service was where I could get low cost recipes which I still use. There are things that have stayed with me -- recipes that are family favorites, what to do with my apple trees, how to get my soil for my garden tested -- and things even beyond the crisis type of things.

Just coordinating the resources of the volunteers in the community...If it weren't for the Extension Office, I don't know who would do that.

I feel that the overall quality of what Extension has offered has been better [than] what you sometimes get in community education in the school district.

And, the educational methods used by Extension were cited --

Extension is good at teaching.

The Extension Service is excellent in training, in the way that they train.

They are very fast at getting out information that you request.

Giving children, as well as youth and adults, a hands-on experience in [learning] something, doing it, and sharing it with other people.

Working with individuals on a one-to-one basis when it is important for a person to have that extra personal touch.

Participants were particularly complimentary about informational materials and literature that is available from extension --

[Extension has] some excellent materials for people to use.

[The material] comes in an unbiased way, and it comes from a research base.

And the materials are also updated.

When I worked with the director of a community center, she was just elated and couldn't believe the materials I [had brought]...and that the kids could actually keep them...her comment was, "Where have you been hiding these [materials], why isn't everybody using this program?"

Extension does well in the information area...writing literature.

All of the accessing of information...I think you do that very well.

The printed material that is available to you just by requesting it.

I can come in and pick up something for self-learning to better a situation or solve a problem or I can learn about a project...some of the materials that [Extension] has are excellent for doing that on your own or working with groups.

There is a publication put out...family focus or something...that is tremendous, that is great. We do single parents' support groups. The one-page discussions...are very thoughtful...very sensitive...and have wide application to all sorts of family situations. One of our deep concerns is strengthening families. This is a very helpful...I don't know anyone [else] who is doing that...it goes all over the place, all sorts of people are using it, and you may not know that.

And the cross-cultural values of extension programs were recognized --

Different ethnic group [members in Ramsey County] contribute something to the total learning process of all of us.

My two daughters went to Japan on the LABO [exchange program] and we've had four guests from Japan in our home since they went. My children...and the three girls that came to our home have learned [about] a completely different culture by living there. There is no other way they could have had this [learning opportunity]. Some of our neighbors who had very bad feelings toward the Japanese relating back

to the Second World War changed their minds after meeting these girls [who lived in our home].

Because there was a [4-H member from an ethnic group] in one of the county [4-H] Arts-In, [that helped] make us kids more aware [of cultural differences]. [It was] just extraordinary...I don't get a chance to be around [people from other] cultures.

As well as opportunities for intergenerational learning in Extension --

I think that Extension does a good job in allowing families to work together.

I'm thinking about the bread making training coming up soon...that has been a very experimental thing for adults and youth working together...I do think it's an important contribution...It wasn't always a parent and child, it could also be a leader working with youth...I think that is very important.

In the 4-H program, we don't segregate boys from girls...we have all kids working together where there is an expectation for parents or other adults to get involved...some organizations don't get into parental involvement.

WHAT IS UNIQUE. Several participants felt that the Ramsey County Extension Service had some unique qualities:

[Extension is] that unique link between the University of Minnesota and the community...people can readily go to no other place for research-based information...people come to us for an unbiased opinion and that's why they do.

If [Extension] were not there, we won't have access to the research from the University. University professors are too busy to answer the consumer questions.

[Extension] provides this researched based information sometimes at no charge and other times at a very minimal charge.

It is something of a unique quality that the University can offer the materials at a very reasonable or cheap cost to people.

The same [unique quality] is true with programs; if there is a charge, it is usually for materials which aren't real expensive.

The low cost, if not free, effective programs.

I think one of the unique things is Extension can serve people in different arenas of their life and during the whole life span. One of Extension's uniquenesses is it provides more of a learning service for people to better themselves, and it doesn't matter if you're in a crisis situation or learning for some personal

growth...Some of that maybe can be found through community education, but I think what Extension teaches is more extended, it's longer lasting, it's not just one class or a series of five or six classes...generally people can get involved to the extent that they want to know.

I feel the services we get from Ramsey County Extension Service are not available through other sources, and if they are, they aren't as successful [as the Extension programs are].

Extension is the only place that puts [nutrition education] in a practical frame so that consumers can make wise decisions.

The pilot programs that Ramsey County has been working with [are unique]; I've been involved in several--the energy program, and now this ANSWER-U [program].

With the County [4-H] Arts-In, Ramsey County was the first in the state to have that [program].

The 4-H in the Classroom program has to be innovative; you get comments from many in the metro area, "You mean, there's 4-H in Ramsey County?"

CONSUMER EDUCATION

This program provides information to consumers about questions primarily related to family living and horticulture. The following opinions were offered about the importance of this program emphasis in Ramsey County --

One of the important things we are doing well in Extension is answering consumer questions...when the consumers call, it is very important to them, and they want that answer as soon as possible.

The call-in service that is sponsored by Extension was cut back a few years ago because of budget cuts. We in the library field were disappointed to see that...Now there are services available through Extension, if I'm not mistaken, where people can call in about questions related to the home, chemicals, gardening, and a few other things. We couldn't handle some of these questions very well in the library, we depended on Extension to handle that type of question. It was very valuable. I think that program should be looked at again [with] the possibility of expansion and making it more available...

I could add to that too because [my agency] has been used as a referral now that those questions are no longer being answered by the Extension Service. I think our focus is more limited than theirs; perhaps this is a service that needs to be looked at [for continuation].

When they took the "Call Your County Extension Agent for Help" away from the counties...I think they took a lot away from the general consumer. ...It's now a 50 cent charge or whatever it is at the University, and you don't know who you're getting.

The reporters at the paper don't get as many straight information calls as we did five or ten years ago when we had a different structure...Now, a receptionist could be referring calls to Extension and other appropriate sources. We used to get [an] incredible amount of information calls...and refer lots of calls to Extension.

I think the ANSWER-U program makes a unique contribution because of the specialist's involvement.

An example of a question that I had last week [on Answer-U]...someone wanted to remodel an old house which had a limestone foundation and it kept sluffing off. ...through the ANSWER-U program, this person was given access to a professor who has done research on that question. I'm sure that dollars and lots of time were saved in deciding how to finish off the basement of this house.

We try to put an economic value on some of the questions that come in [to ANSWER-U] ...it might be a stain on a rug, or it might deal with weatherizing a home. ...those things can evolve into a lot of money for the consumer.

EXPANDED FOOD AND NUTRITION EDUCATION PROGRAM [EFNEP]

The federally-funded program is offered to low income and minority families. Paraprofessionals work primarily on a one-to-one basis with the family and teach nutrition information and basic food preparation skills. Observations about the importance of this program include:

The services that the EFNEP program provides now are excellent as far as being able to go into the homes [of low income families]. EFNEP teaches them the basic skills that they need...even how to boil potatoes...we're looking at just real basic survival skills...in the kitchen and food budgeting. The clients that I have talked to who have worked with Extension Agents improved their skills.

I have found that [EFNEP] is very helpful to my community...the Hmong...because a lot of women lack skill in using your American products. Sometimes they would leave the milk outside [the refrigerator] for a long, long time until they give it to a child. That is when the EFNEP worker tries to educate the woman in that household to do it differently. Even though they don't like to drink milk, they were able to use some of it in cooking for the nutrition part. The other thing is that they [teach] the women of the house how to clean the kitchen and the house so it's safe for the children.

[They're teaching] some basic skills like you have to put the eggs in the refrigerator and not in the drawer.

I would say to the [EFNEP worker], "I have a group of Southeast Asian ladies that...I want you to show them how to clean the ovens the way we do in EFNEP so they don't go out and buy these expensive products." She would round up the group and do that. I knew that I could get that [help from the EFNEP worker].

Oh, yes, yes, yes, the people valued that kind of assistance. I wish you could have experienced [this EFNEP worker's] going away party with the Southeast Asian families. I mean they had a party and very sad goodbyes. She had formed really close relationships [after] working with them in their homes for about a year.

I definitely think that the programs dealing with the Indo-Chinese are relevant and need to be expanded.

I think that the EFNEP [program] is very relevant at this point, especially with the pending cuts in AFDC and welfare. Single parent families with small children are really stuck in the middle of that. I think now more than ever they need some type of a program that Extension can offer.

In the EFNEP program, which is a free program for low-income families, a lot of education was done through one-to-one counseling...which is different from other agencies. [The other agencies] are done in 5 minutes. We were able to spend an amount of time with one person over a period of time...we see results take place. The other agencies are dealing with the masses... I don't know if each individual's needs are really met in that sense.

I think the [EFNEP] program is very important, and anything that is done in the foods and nutrition area -- money spent in those areas, from what I have read, comes back [as benefits to] people. ..it has a very definite place [in Extension].

4-H YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

Participants had the following observations about the 4-H program in general:

Programs like 4-H fill a niche in the strengthening of character and kids getting confidence in themselves that is unique that few other programs can provide...maybe no other programs can provide, and I'd like to see those [features] strengthened.

Younger kids have role models with older kids and older kids have a chance to do leadership; I think that's a very important aspect of 4-H.

4-H has been really great for some of these young people...I've seen the growth in them over the five years that I have been here if they stay with the program.

There are awards programs, and [4-H members] work with volunteers...Extension does a good job of recognizing people. ..There are some real positive things that come from that.

Definitely, there is a relevance in 4-H for youth in terms of career planning and getting subjects that they aren't getting in school.

They had opportunities they would never get in high school. 4-H is very good in developing confidence in kids, self-confidence, good self-image.

There are a lot of good programs in 4-H...I understand there's not a lot of home ec classes being offered to high school youth now...[young people can] learn all the [home economics] principles in 4-H. Both of my daughters are ending up in fields [that had their beginning in] 4-H and foods.

My son is very interested in photography as a result of his 4-H experience, now he is planning on going to a college that offers it.

You have all of these problems with drugs and dropouts with kids...you don't see that if you have kids involved in the 4-H programs.

4-H is true to life...you're not dealing with a certain age group...or just boys. That's not the way real life is. There's been more interest when you're dealing with kids from 8 to 18 and from both sexes.

I had two kids that have gone through the 4-H program and just had excellent experiences with dozens of kids involved.

One thing about 4-H...it's the subject or project area [plus] the fact that it's family oriented. ...Some programs offered for kids don't necessarily involve a parent or guardian, and they only involve kids from the same age range.

A bit [of 4-H] rubs off [on every member]...somewhere along the line it's going to spark something in that child that may be useful to him the rest of his life...[even though] it's hard to measure the effectiveness of 4-H.

There were also positive opinions about specific 4-H events and activities:

4-H'ers learn just so much in demonstrations...it's something they've learned [and became] a valuable tool through high school, college, and

now into later life. They learned things that are invaluable, and they learned self-discipline. ...so many things in the 4-H program.

I learned things in 4-H ... like management.

Another important aspect is 4-H camp. That has always been a good experience, ...as kids become older, they can become counselors, ...it's good training for them, ...and kids just love camp.

The horse program for handicapped youth is very important because there are not very many things in this area for the handicapped.

Some young people who have gone to college have said how their professors have commented on [their ability to] get up and talk in front of groups...that's what they have gotten through demonstrations and photography groups and [other] things they have done.

Through the school system and community centers, 4-H is helping kids learn how to cook and clean and participate in plays and demonstrations and learn public speaking...that some of these kids don't have any involvement with. ...I think that's a fine way of doing it -- it's called 4-H in the Classroom.

What the majority of the kids liked, and what they really cared about was group activity and the spirit that they got when they worked together on a project whether it was a community project or a Share-The-Fun act.

However, there are areas of improvement which 4-H should address in the opinion of certain focus group interview participants --

When I was [a 4-H leader], the kids could have cared less...about their individual skills...they could do that some other place...most of them never exhibited a thing. We have to do some hard thinking about what we can do to make and help 4-H remain viable for the kids in the urban areas.

What do you do to hold on to the teenage boy when he is about 14 and feels that he is too old for 4-H? I've seen that happen too, a number of times, including my son.

I was involved with a 4-H club that died and seems to not have a lot of possibility for resuscitation at this point.

HOME STUDY GROUPS

Traditionally, the Extension Service has reached homemakers through small, organized groups in different areas and neighborhoods of the county. Positive perceptions of this program include the following:

I've been particularly pleased with the homemaker section; the information given us is really good, ...lessons are all planned and meaningful.

The Dairy Council has collaborated with the home study groups. I know that the quality of information given through those groups has certainly kept up with the times. I think [the program] used to include more basic information. Now, they are more sophisticated, and I feel that's right on target because there aren't other groups available for that type of home learning program.

I have worked with a woman on the east side of St. Paul who very much appreciates the homemaker program. Those programs are very important to women who do not have a lot of social support and don't have a lot of connections in their community. Even though she certainly needs the basic skills, I think it's the support, kand going out of her home [to activities] that's really helpful.

Once a month we meet with our neighbors and we have a lesson that has been prepared by and with and for us through the Extension personnel...the lesson is important, but it's also the sense of community...and at the same time you've learned something. Because many people are working, this is one way that you can get the socialization aspect but at the same time you're going for a purpose.

Middle income people are involved--well every [income] level is involved with home study groups.

We have one lady in her 80s who is going through chemotherapy and that causes depression...We don't want her to drop out because we discovered that she is depressed, and it's extremely important to her that she participate in the program because of the social contact.

We did a program on "Financial Planning for Retirement" which was aimed at [the aging population] group. ...although you are supposed to be planning at an earlier age, [the material] covered those who are retired as well.

There was [a lesson] on HMOs. That was a helpful program and a lot of people got information on how to select an HMO or how to select a health service.

There were also comments about possible improvements --

[In the lesson] they're trying to cover such a broad spectrum, and they can't get specific enough... I see as part of my responsibility as a leader to make sure that I focus in on the specifics. Our group had the feeling that [a particular lesson] was just too general...they couldn't in an hour's time get specific enough to help some person. You come away wanting more than what's available.

Maybe there aren't a sufficient number [of programs] for the older age group.

HORTICULTURE/AGRICULTURE RELATED

Perceptions about the appropriateness and relevance of these programs came from program participants, Master Gardener Volunteers, and from agency representatives --

When we moved to Roseville, I was able to learn through the help of the Ramsey County Extension Service many ways of improving my first love which has now become gardening of flowers, vegetables and fruits. My husband and I are very active with the community center where they have a senior garden. It's only through the Ramsey County program that I am able to have this enthusiasm and knowledge.

I feel that the [Horticulture] programs certainly are [relevant and appropriate] because many people that haven't been are gardening now, and there's many more that should be growing some of their own food.

The Master Gardeners [are relevant] because people are using them [for advice on how to produce] the foods that we are eating.

The Horticulture department [is relevant because] I think of all the chemicals that are used [to produce food]. I think it is extremely important that information [about chemicals] is readily available both to market gardeners as well as to families.

When I visit with Master Gardeners from other counties, they think that Ramsey County's program here is tremendous.

[Extension] is really good at doing the Master Gardener program.

We have worked with Extension on a gardening program [at the American Indian Center]. We have about 50 Indian families...they are able to raise about $600 to $800 worth of food in the gardens. You multiply 50 by $800, that is $40,000 in terms of money.

OUTREACH HOME ECONOMICS

This program emphasis has focused on educational programs in areas other than nutrition for low-income families and on cooperative programs with other agencies that serve families. Recent efforts have dealt with training volunteers as consultants in energy conservation and in family financial management, and with developing educational video materials for the St. Paul Housing Agency. Participants offered observations about the relevance and appropriateness of these program efforts:

Extension [worked with] the Housing Agency to develop a 17 minute educational film for the Hmong community at Mt. Airy. It's educational in terms of how to use an apartment that they rent. I think this is a step forward in [providing] an educational program with [another agency].

The resources of both the Extension Service and the St. Paul School District Adult Homemakers Program are making it possible for us to provide an [educational] service to our residents that is so needed.

I want to express my appreciation, and I don't think I can say it strongly enough, for the assistance we got [from Extension].. [While] we are landlords, we have to enforce the lease, we must enforce the rules and regulations, ... we want to do that in a humane manner. It is necessary that we help our residents learn [what] our rules and regulations are so they can follow them. I want to expand what we did because we need to communicate with minorities and other cultures in other than English.

The single parent's support group [newsletter]...I used to get that mailing. ...that has been very helpful as a referral for me in dealing with single parents and looking for a support group within the community. Something like this should continue.

The energy program [is relevant] because they work with neighborhood groups, and ...that started about five years ago when there was so much talk about energy...that certainly is up to date.

I did a little with the energy program...I was teaching some who would not go to the other groups on a one-to-one [basis] in the home. I would make an appointment ...and we would discuss the materials. ...There were about 15 homes in the area that I know have some major insulation, and part of it was because of the knowledge I had and was able to give them. These people probably would not have gone to the Minnesota group.

As I see it, [however], it's kind of a duplication of effort with the Minnesota Energy Department.

I feel that some neighborhoods were targeted to be worked with by [the Energy Department] because maybe they couldn't afford to pay their fuel bill or they had real problems. I think that a lot of us middle class people didn't get anything [from the Energy Department], and this is where [Extension] volunteers could help.

Since the early 1970s, the American Indian Center has worked with Extension. It has not been well publicized, but we have a food shelf, we have a gardening program, we have home canning projects, we have nutrition meetings every month. It [would] not be successful without Extension's input. Our volunteer home [food] preservation consultants, our cooking classes ... I don't think we could have done what we did without networking with Extension.

[Extension] developed that money thing too [family financial management]...and is doing a good job [with it].

VOLUNTEER DEVELOPMENT AND LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

Although leadership development and volunteer development have not been identified as "programs," focus group interview participants felt that Extension's efforts in these areas were appropriate and relevant to the county. As for their work in developing skills and competencies of volunteers,

[Extension] offers some good opportunities for volunteers to challenge themselves to grow...to take responsibility, and then provides training...and support...to assist them.

I realize that [Extension] does training with [other agencies]...I've seen some combined training of volunteers, and I thought it was great.

It's only through the Ramsey County [Extension] program that I'm able to have this enthusiasm and knowledge [for my volunteer assignment], and I am very grateful for that.

Leadership development is another dimension that participants commented on -

The leadership aspect...I think that's so important, and I think Extension is extremely good at it.

The community leadership program is helping people learn how to grapple with issues. I think that is a really important program, something that probably other Human Service agencies should know about.

Oh, definitely, Extension and 4-H helped develop my son's leadership skills...because he did not get [that] training in school. He picked it up in 4-H. ...Now he is a leader in the community in all aspects, the Extension Service has been such an excellent program, I can't cut it any way, I just can't cut it down.

I see definite change in my own son, in the leadership and courage and all the things you need in order to get up and speak in front of people...I can see how it's helped other kids.

IMAGE AND IDENTITY

Questions were asked of the focus group participants about the image of the Ramsey County Extension Service. Specifically, perceptions and opinions were sought regarding questions such as:

1. **What words would you use to describe the Ramsey County Extension Service?**

2. **What do you think of when you hear about the County Extension Service?**

3. **What do you think other people think the County Extension Service is and does?**

4. **What do you think the Ramsey County Extension Service could do to impress people or to improve its image?**

One of the major findings of the study is that the image of the Ramsey County Extension Service offered by the group participants presents a major problem to the organization. The prevailing image is one of "Agriculture, 4-H and County Fair."

However, different images emerged from four different potential users and the general public; county and community agency/organization representatives; and public officials. Problems associated with the current image(s) of the Ramsey County Extension Service were identified, and solutions for dealing with the image problems were proposed.

THE PROBLEM

At least two respondents stated that "Extension is truly one of the best kept secrets in the state of Minnesota." The typical urban/suburban resident of Ramsey County probably cannot imagine the range of programming that is available because of the image that he or she has. Comments, such as the following, were offered:

> It's really an image and perception issue of what the role of Ramsey County Extension is in an urban setting.
>
> I agree with everyone who said that image is a problem ... I think there is an image there that needs to be worked on.
>
> A lot of it has to do with their [Extension] image, and I really think that it can be changed because it's not what they're doing, it's what they're not doing -- it's [Extension] not letting people know they're there for them.
>
> I mean ... it's really what does Ramsey County Extension do in the city? ... I know that you've co-sponsored the Minnesota Canoe Association ... and the Urban Rural Talks. I know all this stuff ... but Joe Blow down the street doesn't know that.

So the connotation is that if you're living in an urban area, you certainly don't need information from the Farm Campus, so maybe it's an image thing. ... maybe it's the image of what an Extension Service really is.

And while some of the respondents were aware of efforts to convey a different image --

I think they've done a certain amount of improvement in the last year ... they are answering the phone differently, they have a different name. But, I think that they maybe could go a little further.

But people also felt that the Extension Service could go further:

I think that the U of M Extension Service has been kind of slow to change this whole "Home Study/Homemaker Group/taking cows to the State Fair" kind of image that the urban population does not tap into. ... I think there are services available that people just can't imagine you're supplying ... because of this image they have.

AN "AGRICULTURAL/4-H/COUNTY FAIR" IMAGE PREDOMINATES

Repeatedly, the image of Extension given dealt with "agriculture" or "4-H" or "county fair."

That impression about "Extension is cows and cooking" is still the first one out there. ... that's what it is, and it's how to freeze beans correctly ...

I think a lot of people think it's farm-related ...

Or that it primarily exists for 4-H.

I grew up in a rural community in Iowa so when I hear Extension Service, I think of 4-H. ... I think of being involved in cooking, and sewing and taking care of animals and stuff like that.

I always thought of it more as just a source of information for gardening, farming, and this type of thing.

I do feel that many people in Ramsey County think of the Extension Service as being available to people only for agricultural or horticultural interests, and maybe 4-H.

... to a lot of people "Extension" means agriculture, and they say "that's not for us."

Many people think that in the youth program we help kids learn how to raise animals and become farmers.

I see them as tied into the gardening system ... helping the Hmong people with their gardens or helping city people have gardening experience.
I have to admit pretty much ignorance ... to Extension. I'm familiar with the Extension at the University ... but not so much the County Extension program. I sense a word of home economics ... but I always thought there was some sort of focus on agricultural aspects through that program.

For those of us who grew up near your home office, Extension is little 4-H displays at the Ramsey County Fair. I mean that's what Ag Extension is to me.

In discussing a possible funding cut for Extension with a friend, this friend said "there wouldn't be any county fair, there wouldn't be any 4-H." That was her impression of what the Extension Service does.

Everybody knows about 4-H, but that's for rural kids. But they're flabbergasted that there's been an urban club in Ramsey County for 25 years.

A few years ago my daughters came home from Washington with a badge that said "4-H is cows and cooking." I think that they need some type of slogan that says that all Extension is not [just] cows and cooking.

People are really disappointed when they come to the County Fair and can't find the animal barns; they really are looking for that sort of thing.

When I was a neighborhood worker in an inner city neighborhood, I found that I had to work with and talk to people in Extension about what they offered. Because my image of Extension was rural, I had to actually talk to a worker at Ramsey County Extension to find a way to work together in programs as I didn't know what the programs were unless I talked to someone there.

When I was younger, I used to date a lady that was a county extension agent ... outstate now ... where they function like you mention here ... but I always have had problems in my mind ... what does Extension do in an urban county like Ramsey?

We went through Extension to do some soil tests ... which were very successful.

This is what I think it is ... I see Extension Services including things like Homemakers and 4-H ... and consumer questions ... in horticulture and home aids, and that kind of thing. I came from a rural area ... there we had one Extension agent who was very active in the community of homemakers ... and there were county extension agents who would help farmers ... and 4-H people came out of the Extension office also.

While we didn't explore with the groups why this image of Extension persists, some possible reasons were given:

> I think many of us have a historical view ... my understanding is that Extension began as a way to bring information to families in rural communities...
>
> The billboard [in front of the office building] is old Extension I think. It's the County Fair billboard; it has 4-H and Homemaker Groups. It doesn't have all the stuff that we really do.
>
> I think there's a misconception about what we do based on people's history [with Extension in a rural setting] and thinking that Extension is a rural program when it is a very urban program.

DIFFERENCES IN IMAGES OF EXTENSION AMONG DIFFERENT GROUPS

Invitations were extended to three kinds of people to participate in the focus group interviews. We wanted to hear from people who were most familiar with the Ramsey County Extension program. This group included current and former participants in the Homemakers and 4-H Clubs, volunteers working currently with the Master Gardener, 4-H, Energy Education, and ANSWER-U (Consumer Education) programs, and current and former paraprofessionals working with the Expanded Food and Nutrition Program (for low-income families). The second group of individuals included adults who were expected to have no familiarity with the Extension program; these individuals were recruited as representatives of the general public. The third, and largest group of individuals represented agencies in the community and units of county government. While elected officials from Ramsey County or the City of St. Paul did not participate in the interviews, the image of Extension as perceived by public officials entered the discussion. The differences found among these four groups in their image(s) of the Ramsey County Extension Service are reported below.

VOLUNTEER STAFF AND PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS. The "Agricultural/4-H as cows and cooking/County Fair" image did not characterize the views of current and former program participants and of volunteers working with various Extension programs. When asked about what words they would use to describe Extension, they said:

> educational ... cooperative ... friendly ... public service organization ... wealth of knowledge ... expertise ... 4-H activities ... resources ... family ... expands horizons ... opportunities ... helpfulness ... source of information ...

And phrases such as ---

> Makes people grow, no matter what age you are.
>
> The Extension office -- it becomes kind of a library source.
>
> Educational arm of the University of Minnesota.

We're people oriented.

I think we're influential; I think we influence people and agencies in many ways.
I think the Extension Office is agricultural related, and I think they're doing a fairly good job of getting into the urban area of blending agricultural and urban.

I thought for a very long time, too, that [Extension] was strictly agriculture ... but I have learned that there are a lot of concerns that the Extension agency has about helping in a lot of different areas. I wasn't aware of some of the social concerns, but things like financial help with the family ... nutrition ... and it wasn't simply good recipes for hot dishes ... it was dealing with how a woman with a large family can stretch her [resources] ... and they work with what were the people's needs in the city ... they're very aware of the needs of their own [Ramsey] county.

Not glitzy, [not] glossy, [not] well financed.

One person stated how she had learned about Extension --

I think I have learned more about [Extension] by getting more closely involved with being on the Home Council board, and by working in the office [as a program volunteer]. I think the more you get into [Extension], the more you learn about how far reaching it is.

However, the image of the Extension Service program by the users and volunteer staff is a fragmented one. People who are intensely involved in one program may or may not be aware of other Extension programs. For example --

People usually know [Extension] by the program they have been involved in, so 4-H families know [the] 4-H people [Extension Agent(s)] ... and the Home Study Group [members] know the Home Study program; people that are Master Gardeners know the Master Gardener program, and there may be some overlap, but not always.

Even people who have been in [Extension] for a while don't understand the whole structure and what's offered.

I'm sitting in a little corner not knowing the whole program.

I think part of the problem is that I don't know all the programs that are available. The ones we utilize ... are good, but I don't know everything that is provided at the Extension Service.

There was also speculation by an Extension staff member that the Extension Service is misunderstood by its participants:

> I think that sometimes it's very difficult for participants in [Extension] programs to understand our structure because we get federal funds, we get county funds and to figure out how all of that works ... some [staff] are county employees, some are federal employees, some are University employees, some are University civil service ... that can be very confusing in understanding who we are.

POTENTIAL USERS AND THE GENERAL PUBLIC. The idea of "non-image" among the general public who are potential users of the Ramsey County Extension Service was expressed by potential users themselves and by individuals in the other two groups. Statements from potential users --

> I had heard the name [of Extension] ... as to what you did ... or anything, I had no opinion up until now [the focus group interviews].

> My only direct experience [with Extension] was having some Extension people do evaluations for a degree that I worked on at Metro State. ... But, I don't know what the broad programs of the Extension Service are.

> I've gotten an education here [at the interview] ... I didn't know you existed.

> I know [Extension] is not farm, but I don't always know the what because it's pretty broad to me.

> I wouldn't know who to call to get bugs out of a tree. I'm familiar with the newsletter that you put out ... I don't even know the title ... "Young Families" or "Families With Young Children" or something like that ... addresses child rearing issues. I also know there's a number you can get to call for consumer information ... that's about the extent of my knowledge.

Agency personnel observed --

> I just have to be blunt. I think the general public doesn't know there is an Extension Service.

> I'd say that it's pretty hard for somebody to stumble upon Extension ... they would have to kind of know what they are looking for and where to go, and people don't. And, you know [that] here you're not a visible place like you would be in a rural community.

> Just the general knowledge you can get from the Extension Service is just incredible. I'm not sure that people know that.

> People just don't know what you're about now.

Extension doesn't mean anything to them [the general public]. The University is one thing and that's a place of learning. [Ramsey County] Extension means a barn out on White Bear Avenue, but they don't even know what that means. I'm not talking about the clients you work with, but people that I see on a day-to-day basis. I sell products to people in their homes, and there's an article that I use about bugs in your kitchen that just came out from the Extension Service. People are just flabbergasted that they could have gotten this information for years just by calling the Extension Service. They have no correlation between [Extension] and the University of Minnesota. Those of us who know [about Extension] cherish them.

Having grown up in a rural area ... and contrasting the visibility of Extension in a rural community versus an urban community, I guess I could say that I see a legion of difference. ... in the true small town rural community type setting that I lived in as a child, Ag Extension was critically important to just about every single person in the county. ... I would say that at least 75 to 80 percent of the people in that county had some contact with Extension, used the services at least once a year, could tell you at least something important that Extension did. I would not even hazard to guess what percentage of the metropolitan population either (a) knew about Extension or (b) had used its services during the past year. ... [I would suspect that it is] pretty low. I think [that Extension] does suffer some image problems.

That's what the Extension Service has ... is no [community] image ... from what I can tell.

Well, it's sort of a very kind of comfortable nebulous image I think [Extension has] ... my perception of the image of Ag Extension is that it is a nice thing ... but it isn't necessarily on the cutting edge. ... I think that is sort of the prevailing image [of Extension] especially in the urban area.

It is fuzzy ... and what information [the public has] is probably outdated. ... It's not likely that they see you as "yes, they're good at this, this and this." 4-H is the only thing they see as an urban program.

Having worked for over 10 years in referrals, I found that nobody knew anything at all about Ramsey County Extension. I would say something about a specific program and they were just aghast to think that was even available.

And, the Extension volunteers and program participants were in agreement:

> I think the public, in general, doesn't realize how much information is available to them through the Extension department; that may be one place where we need to work a little more.
>
> I think that the average person, if they don't have any experience with it, doesn't really understand what [Extension is about]. They may not know about us.
>
> I think with the general public, the word "unfamiliar" is what I would use [to describe what they know about Extension].
>
> I think there a lot [of people] who just don't even know that the office exists over on White Bear Avenue.
>
> I have talked to some people that have had just quick contact with the Extension office -- called for something, or with some program -- and I've got some feedback that they are a little confused. They get the impression that there are so many programs going on and so many people involved ... that people ar getting confused.

The "non-image" can translate into problems regarding participation in Extension programs --

> I'm sure that people who have been moving into the county are not aware of the fact that there is much help for them in home gardens.
>
> [My training as an energy education volunteer] hasn't been used really at all. I've done some personal things for my church, and for my family with their energy situation, and I've talked to other people about it, but don't get the requests.
>
> Extension is a positive ... [but] ... I've associated Extension with the University. I'm not sure about the Ramsey [County Extension Service].

And, into problems with public funding of Extension --

> I think if you ask a lot of citizens in Ramsey County if that [county] money was validly spent, if they don't know what is going on in the Extension Office, they're going to say "Well, we're spending way too much, I mean too much of our money is going there."

AGENCY STAFF MEMBERS **Professional staff members working in county and community agencies reported two problems associated with the image of the Ramsey County Extension Service. One, they did not consider themselves adequately informed about the Extension Service and its resources; and, two, they indicated that they did not know how to access the Extension staff. Several professional agency staff members commented that they just didn't know very much about the Ramsey County Extension Service:**

> As I indicated, I never had much contact with the Extension Service, and I guess one of the things I discovered was it wasn't very easy to find out about the Extension Service. ... I don't particularly consider myself to be too isolated as a community member, but frankly, I don't have any idea what the Extension Service does, and that would tend to indicate to me that maybe you are not getting the publicity that you ought to.
> As I listen to all the things that Extension does and all the ways that people are using them, I thought I was pretty well aware because of the place that I sit and the exposure that I get to projects and departments, but a lot of these things I am not aware of [and] was not aware of the extent to which they were being used.
>
> I have been aware of Extension for a long time, and our staff has used their materials. But, I have had a perception for a couple of years now that we are not using them to the extent that we could.
>
> I am learning more and more that I know very little about what the Ramsey County Extension Office is all about.
>
> I'm saying that there's a lot of separate programs in separate areas of the Extension Office, and that people could be made more aware of what was going on.
> Sometimes I get this feeling that Extension programs do everything because of their concern with the whole life development from birth to death that I'm not always sure how to use them well. [When it comes to planning], I am not always sure how to use Extension ... in terms of the larger planning issues.
>
> We saw this happen again and again when we asked Extension to convene Human Service providers and other agencies within their service area that people just met one another for the first time --even in communities as small as Adams, down by Iowa.
>
> I talked with [a person in a related subject area] .. and I would say that she's really on top of her stuff ... but she knows nothing about the Extension Service, she just doesn't know.

When I first came to the [Refugee Resettlement] Social Adjustment program, I didn't know about the Extension program until I met a staff member. So, to me that's the only way I'm going to know about the program that is being serviced to my community [by getting to know a staff member].

One agency person knew about Extension because she had once been employed by the Ramsey County Extension Service:

Now that I'm on the other side, I even appreciate [having been in Extension] even more because I know that there's someplace that I can call. I have that information; I know what they can do. I've done that.

But, others did not know how to access the Extension Service.

I'm not sure specifically how to access the service. I meet in a lot of groups, but in none of the groups that I meet with is there a representative of the Extension Service. So [Extension] is not an easy access to me.

I have been saying to myself, I need to explore who to go to [in Extension]. I haven't even known who to go to so I need some visibility and linking into the agency system; that is so important.

PUBLIC OFFICIALS. Elected officials from Ramsey County and the City of St. Paul were not involved in the focus group interviews. Nevertheless, some discussion addressed the image of Extension held by government leaders, and its importance for adequate funding of Extension programs:

They [the County Commissioners] can't make the decisions about [funding Extension] if they don't know [what Extension is doing]. ... they will make the decisions based on whatever their image is ... of Ag Extension. ... But no matter how much information you give them, and no matter how much you are a worthy cause, there is a fixed dollar amount [in the pot] and ... you may still lose. but if they don't know what they are voting for ... from my perspective, you haven't got a chance.

Because of [another agency's] image, I see a totally different reaction when [they] come to the county board and seek 8 million dollars than when Extension comes and wants $30,000 to buy a copy machine. That is the difference. ... I think a lot of it has to do with image ... and not just the County Board has of Extension ... but the whole community. ... what the whole community thinks of Extension.

It is very difficult to overcome an image ... a bad image is probably easier to overcome than no image.

62 or 63 percent of the county budget is required by law. ... I mean the county has no choice ... the County Board has to approve in order to comply with Federal law. So what's left is spread out over tons of programs ... and Extension is just one of many very important programs.

I do think the visibility problem ... image problem ... is real important.

Just make sure that the policy makers do know [about the Extension Service].

I think [that what is important] is how much information have you given them so that it is correct information and they can see it. ... and I think they are all astute people who are aware of community problems and communities.

We cannot assume that people know we are around. About a year and a half ago, I found myself sitting with a small group in [the St. Paul] Mayor's office. We were discussing how his office could become involved in a future project. He was not present but three of his staff were. I said we were working with Ramsey county Extension, and the three staff people said, "Ag Extension?" They said they didn't even know there was one. And we said, "Haven't you driven down White Bear Avenue and seen that big barn?" They said, "Oh yes, I've seen the building, didn't know we had an Extension Service here." I am sure the Mayor knows that Extension is around, but those people were the ones who were there working on his behalf, and they did not have a whole lot of knowledge [about Extension].

PROGRAM IMPLICATIONS FOR THE FUTURE

THE ROLE OF EDUCATION

This topic was not explored in any depth with any particular group of participants; yet ideas about serving the needs of people with problem solving educational opportunities were stated. The "Potential Users" groups were asked to identify sources of information they used to solve problems or to learn something with the following questions:

> We'd like to ask each of you to take just a few moments and think about the last time that you needed some information ... and then share that experience where you needed information with the group ... and where you go for that type of information.

A question about the link between the University of Minnesota and the Ramsey County Extension Service was asked in the following way (with some groups):

> As the "front door" of the outreach unit of the University of Minnesota in Ramsey County, are the resources of the University being accessed effectively by Ramsey County through the Extension Service?

The thoughts which emerged that relate to the role of Extension (as an educational agency) in Ramsey County were:

> We are looking at what [Extension] can do to meet the immediate needs of people ... what help [they want] in living their lives more fully [and] in a more interesting way. How Extension fits into that is of great interest at this particular time. I'm very much aware that Extension, probably like everything else, has to change a little.
>
> Everything we have discussed tonight is a real need ... it may pertain to different age groups ... to different economic levels, but there is a need there. If you start addressing these needs, you're going to have your audience. Addressing these needs ... and somehow making people aware [of what] you're doing about them [is your task].
>
> Usually every family is forced into having to make some decisions.
>
> Extension has the capability and the research to [offer educational programs] that fit the needs of clientele].
>
> [Extension] helps people make their own decisions; often, the [staff members] don't answer questions but have information to help people answer their questions by themselves.
>
> Extension programs are excellent because [they] educate all [age] levels.
>
> I'm wondering how you get people to care to be educated.
>
> Maybe you can just develop awareness.

You have to have an interest ... develop an interest from awareness ... I think awareness has to come before education.

I see education as kind of the first step ... of the need to go on ... once you're aware of what your alternatives are ... maybe to pursue.

And for those who have awareness already ... maybe some further education on how to take action and get involved ...

The sources of information cited by the "Potential Users" groups included several different individuals and agencies. The public library was cited as the most frequently consulted source:

The Public Library ... the Extension Service ... Government Agencies ... the University of Minnesota ... Personal Friends ... Personal Sources ... Vocational School ... Community College ... Public School ... Historical Societies.

Inquiries to the Extension Service dealt with: (1) information about nitrates in bacon and cured meats, (2) how to get rid of shrews, (3) where to find a bike safety class for his 9 year old, and (4) a problem with a tree. The University of Minnesota was used as a source for : (1) information about getting rid of ants in a mobile home, (2) information about plant materials and bugs, and (3) information from a variety of subject experts on different topics.

The relationship between the Ramsey County Extension Service and the University of Minnesota brought positive comments --

I have a comment on the whole link to the University and the blending of theory and practice, educators, practitioners, making that link as part of the basic mission of Extension. ... I think that should remain unchanged.

I work with Extension and the Food and Drug Administration quite closely. We found out recently that some preliminary research [showed] that diabetics who have taken fish liver oils over a period of six months have been able to reduce the amount of insulin used by 26%. How does that relate to me and the American Indian Center? Well, in every American Indian family, there is either one person that is diabetic in the family, one who is borderline, or one that is in a real critical condition. Suppose that they can confirm these results, and Extension can get this [message] across to American Indian families, you can conceive of what it might do for their health. You can't imagine the impact of diabetes on American Indian families. We've seen somebody take shots every day and what they go through.

... a comment that overlooks (or devalues) the need for research-based information for use in Extension programs --

That comes back to the question, who is the target audience for Extension programs? If it's the public, I don't think it makes any

difference what the actual tie is with the University ... you have to confine the contact with the public to the issue and the amount of information and some things specific. If, however, the targeted audience becomes the providers, the policy makers, those who are in the middle and who in turn have a clientele, then it is very important to access those other departments of the University, including Education, the Medical School, and the Business School.

and, negative comments from people who didn't feel safe on the campus or resented the fee assessed for using the consumer information telephone [Dial-U] service --

I need information from the library at the U, and I am personally afraid to go there at night when I would have time to go because of the danger for women on the campus.

I called the University of Minnesota and paid a fee, but I wanted the information.

I'm not calling the University of Minnesota. I don't know who I'm talking too ... if it's a graduate student or an undergraduate, I have a degree in home economics and I certainly know enough to know that I don't know who I'm talking to over there and I don't know if I can trust the information. I also resent that I have to pay 50 cents to talk to nobody. [Extension] took away the proximity of the people, out of Ramsey County, putting it on the University Campus, which I won't venture on.

EXTENT OF PROGRAM DUPLICATION WITH OTHER AGENCIES

The following question was asked of the interview participants to address this concern:

In your opinion, are there any educational programs and services currently provided by the Ramsey County Extension Service which you think duplicate programs by other agencies? If so, is this a matter of concern?

Some agency representatives felt that there is or could be some duplication of program --

I think there is some duplication.I hope the [participants here] don't go away and say there isn't some duplication out there ... we can do more [cooperation].

[The Energy Education program] is kind of a duplication of effort, as I see it.

What I often see is the leg work which has to be done [when a program is duplicated]. [An agency] put together a Community Leadership program. ... Extension has this wonderful package all put together. Well, [the agency] wrote a grant ... got the grant money ... developed

this leadership program that probably forty people have gone through ... at an extremely high cost in time and grant money. I see people starting up programs instead of going [to Extension] and saying how do you do it, what works?

Extension has to tread on [community and natural resource development] carefully in Ramsey County. There are so many organizations doing what Extension might do ... we have to act as the link to research for those organizations ... that's one area where duplication of programs could be a problem, but certainly helping, assisting, and offering information is not.

Other participants didn't see any duplication of agency programs by Extension:

I'm not aware of any duplication.

The [programs] that I am aware of, I'm not aware that there are duplications.

I don't see any problems with duplication.

As for the programs that I use in Extension, I don't see that any other agency [provides] these services to the community.

No, there isn't any duplication, especially with the EFNEP program. It's nice [that the agencies work together] ... [this agency] is related to nutrition and [the other agency] is related to health, and when [the EFNEP worker] comes in, she can have a different focus.

No, the EFNEP program works very well. When [our staff members] come back and say, "we need to discuss this with a client," ... we reinforce or say to an EFNEP person, "Could you please work on this person?" ... and they can reinforce and take [the matter] a step further. [EFNEP has] the Southeast Asian [workers] which are real helpful, and the Hmong and Cambodian, which is good.

Schools are not educating in home economics ... it's not required like it used to be.

In the area of horticulture, many local gardens store and nurseries have staff that are there to provide answers to people. But we often get the phone call, "They [the garden store/nursery] suggested that I contact you."

Others say that there is duplication, but it is "healthy duplication" --

There is some duplication, but ... it is probably healthy duplication. There may be a certain amount of duplication in the special 4-H project areas. We have a shooting sports program. It is very similar to the program that the state DNR puts on as far as fire safety [is concerned], but the problem is that there is still not enough program going for the amount of demand.

The biggest duplication is probably between the 4-H program and the school districts' shop and home economics [programs]. But, with 4-H you're involved with kids in other age groups and with adults [while] in school [the kids are involved in only their] age group ... and [if] there are programs that they have to take, the kids just do enough to get by.

The 4-H programs offer opportunities to kids who don't have time to take [home economics and shop] courses in school because they're taking academic classes. If you are looking to getting into college, you may need to take other classes ... the time schedule for the learning program in 4-H is much more relaxed than in the schools. You can do things in the afternoons, evening, or weekends through 4-H you wouldn't be getting in schools.

They are duplicated, but there are still an awful lot of kids who aren't getting involved in either one.

Many of the home economics programs in schools are being cut, and parents are saying, "if the kids aren't going to get some of the basics in school and then they're cut from 4-H, where are they going to get [home economics instruction]?" Parents are busy too, and they might think that they should be teaching their kid these things, but, unless you have a structure, it's easy, sometimes, not to do those things.

I can see some duplication between the home study programs and the AARP [American Association of Retired Persons] which I belong to ... I can see duplication only at first. The health resource talk at the monthly meeting may be duplicated with the Home Study Group. The difference I see is that the Home Study Group has a better organized [presentation], has material that they pass out, and has a question and answer period which sometimes are lacking in the other program.

Still others distinguish between 'similarities' and 'duplication' --

It's sort of subtle, and maybe people aren't able to distinguish between similarities and duplication. I'm thinking of community education ... which is doing things that the home economics department used to do such as a lot of instrumental teaching and recreational kinds of things ... Extension is now looking at public policy and family life issues and I don't see that being done on a regular basis by anybody else.

I agree that community education [in the schools] does a lot of things that Home Economics Extension used to do. But once the participants are through [with a class], they're through. Extension has services that [participants] can come back for or follow through with that community education doesn't offer; there can be call-backs, walk-ins, and come back and get more information ... Extension is willing to do that, and I don't think community education is [providing these services].

When we [an agency] sees a client, we see them in a clinic setting, whereas EFNEP and the nursing service can see a client in her home. We may both be talking about nutrition, but [Extension] can approach it in a different way, and they may see different things within the home when they see the client's setting.

There are some things we do that are similar to other services that might be available but I think there are differences that make [the Extension program] unique. People can call General Mills and get answers on how to make conversions for brownies, and that's an appropriate source. But, if they're asking something that needs some science-backed research in an unbiased way, maybe the University [through the Extension Service] is the place to get that. We may offer similar programs in working with youth that Scouts and Campfire offer, but our approach to providing that education is different. We are probably reaching different audiences [with services that may be similar to those of other agencies] ... if Extension eliminates its service, there is no assurance that people will go to those other agencies for the information that Extension has provided.

The Parks and Recreation Department will once in a while offer programs for kids in arts and crafts, and outings [that attract] many thousands of children. We have found that the kids [in our 4-H club] would rather go with us on an outing or camping even though we have to look for $3 to $10 and volunteer food and stuff for the trip. We found that the kids enjoy the companionship and the structural things that 4-H [has to offer].

I touched people ... on a one-to-one basis ... who would not go to the groups [on energy conservation].

Where volunteers could help with the energy program ... was with a lot of middle class people. I feel that the Department [of Energy] targeted [only] some of the neighborhoods to work with ... and a lot of people ... didn't get anything [information about this].

PROGRAM COOPERATION

Currently, there is a lot of interest in inter-agency cooperation and building "partnerships." Two questions were raised with the participants on this topic.

1. From your point of view, are there any educational programs which would be improved if Extension would work with other agencies?

2. Do you think that there are any programs that are provided by other agencies where Ramsey County Extension Service could provide or assist with the educational component of the program?

COOPERATION AMONG AGENCIES IS THE DIRECTION TO GO. The participants were unanimous in the view that agency cooperation was not only desirable but essential for the future. Cooperation is seen as one answer to the problem

of working with increased needs for services while financial resources fail to keep pace with the needs or are even cut. The participants' observations were:

> One thing I find most frustrating on my job is that the dollar decreases or doesn't keep pace as the demand increases. ... Another thing affects my problem is that we feel so pressed time wise ... we have had to really pare down [in staff] and become very efficient. ... We don't have the ability to go in the community and search for what we need. Even if [help] is there, we simply don't have the time to do that. That kind of problem assistance would be tremendously appreciated and very, very useful to us.
>
> I see something that is coming that I think we [should be] paying more attention to ... and that is the term "partnerships." ... Let's get our resources together and make the greatest impact we can on the issues and concerns of the local community. ... No one has a handle about all volunteerism, or all parenting or all early childhood or all literacy programs ... [we] can all do a better job together. ... If there needs to be new programs developed, this kind of [agency] interaction will get the best out of each of our agencies.
>
> I'd like to support the concept of sharing resources. As a public agency also experiencing cut-backs not only in federal but also state and local funds, it's more difficult to meet needs. As an example, we are not able to keep [a health education packet for young families] up and keep replenishing it with new materials. It would be tremendous help to have that kind of consultation available to us.
>
> AIDS is another example of our need to develop materials that can be helpful to people. It would be of great help to us, and to be honest I don't know what I can count on, to have a resource to go to and express what our needs would be over the next two or three years.
>
> In Ramsey County, [Extension] is competing with many programs, some of which are outstanding. ... I think this very competition militates [against the effectiveness of the] Extension Service in an urban setting. ... In a rural community, you have limited [agency] resources where fewer people know each other, and they're very well informed of what everyone is doing ... and they don't have this duplication of effort [because agency personnel tend to know and work with one another].
>
> I think we could probably do more interacting. It's a matter of how you go about, and of course, the time [involved].
>
> [In my agency], I don't have enough money to do true outreach to individual families; the best I can do is to work with local agencies that can reach the people. It's that high touch part of programming [that's needed].

I support the idea of "joint programming" where organizations link up to plan [and carry out the program].

We're dealing with a changing family structure and a changing urban community ... how we provide information has got to have some innovative approaches ... some joint projects which experiment with different [ways of providing information] might be a way for people to become more familiar with our services.

I want to comment on how important it is to link with other resources when resources are so scarce. ... Because we developed a housing program with the Ramsey County Human Services, no new money was required. We used resources that were already available to provide a service ... in a much more efficient and humane way.

I think that [agencies are] not only willing ... they are going to have to [work cooperatively] because somebody up above is going to say, "What are you doing together?" They are not going to sit there and say, "Fine. Here's your pie, here's your piece [of the money]. ...You either see who can do it the best or how you're going to do it best together. ... then we'll give you the resources." I see that as a way of the future for all of us.

That's the way I view it in the future. If people can't work together, ... they are going to drop by the wayside. ... We're [going to have] to deal with issues and concerns ... we are going to do it together.

[My agency] is looking at the schools more and more for educating students about recycling and that kind of thing, ... and, we have to depend on the press to assist us in that, ... I'm seeing more and more cooperation in that area .. recycling is just one of many issues ... The Parks and Recreation Department could be utilized in some of this ... with the development of regional and county parks ... be it horticulture or agriculture ... planning ... reforestation ... trees ... areas of recreation ... tourism working with those areas ... at the county level ... in the parks and recreation systems.

We're approaching [drug abuse education programs] by working through the local school districts.

I think that if [Extension] works with other agencies that believe in what the Ramsey County Extension Service believes in, the number of people assisted [would increase] and we could improve our programs also.

I think [improved communication among agencies] would be really helpful, especially since many of us share and do a lot of referring ... or we get a grant and try to involve them [in providing] different services.

In an era of information where we need to impart information to our clients, the opportunity for general programming with Extension could

save all of us some time as we develop more materials. ... it would be an efficient use of services and provide an overall community approach in a much more effective way.

EXAMPLES OF EXTENSION PROGRAM COOPERATION. Several examples of cooperative programming which involved the Extension Service were cited:

I've worked closely with [an EFNEP worker] because she makes home visits as I do. I've found that it's very helpful when she finds a family who needs counselling or is having problems and social adjustment or mental health and refers [that family] to me. I have also referred families to her because I found a lot of families who did not know how to clean their home or how to cook certain meals for their children or how to manage their money.

Basically, the St. Paul Grower's [Association] needs the cooperation of the Extension Service. ... we're involved with them for educational [programs], for using the building, and for resources. That's important for the people I serve.

We come to you for resources, and maybe even training ... without these, I really feel that we would have a severe loss.

No one else has been able to provide [my agency] with the resources that the Extension Service has.

[Extension] has helped people to make better use of our television series. Television just might get the juices flowing for someone, or it might [plant] the seed of interest in an area, but it is not sufficient information to really impact the viewer. There is not high touch in [viewing the television program]; that's where Extension comes in.

I see Extension as a key player to flush out issues [affecting people] and then make it speak English to people, or whatever the language may be, through the video tape programs and other [methods].

We've been developing television programs dealing with topics such as urban and rural Minnesota, nutritional disorders, AIDS, Women in the 80's. These are broad topics that are yet undefined. I've turned to Extension to help define those issues.

4-H has also set up special programs for different levels in the school. ... the animal science program leader ... takes an incubator in, they hatch baby chicks. They have worked very well with the school system on [fulfilling requests] and giving advice on [their requests].

PROBLEMS IN PROGRAM COOPERATION. But, there are problems the participants recognized in agencies working cooperatively together on programs. For example:

In theory, "inter-agency cooperation" is a wonderful idea ... one of the things that inevitably happens when people convene around the table is that the turf issues start to emerge, and that is just human nature.

We discovered that no one had encouraged agencies to interact [on a face-to-face basis] before. ... There hadn't been anyone step forward and say, "let's sit around the table and learn what each other does and about their resources [which could be shared]."

It is sometimes difficult to get information from some of these agencies. I had to go to trial on one child abuse case where I worked on that for two years before I got anyone to really cooperate with me and say that they were seeing the same things I was seeing ... it got to the point that it was almost too late for them [to help].

I see confusion with some of the things going on in the schools and 4-H. We do a lot of work with the nutrition curriculum for elementary schools...and we are also asked to provide things for 4-H. We are hesitant because we have a sequential curriculum in the school to do the same activities elsewhere [with 4-H]. ...the kids would lose some of their enthusiasm if they have already seen the materials. I think you have to be very clear in defining the role of 4-H and how they work with the school to do some of these things.

I find that agencies that are in the same neighborhoods become competitive for numbers of youth ... everybody's worried about funding ... everybody's competing for numbers because that's how their funding runs. ... that takes away the feeling of working towards including an educational component in [non-educational activities for youth].

It's very frustrating if you're an EFNEP worker, and you're out there by yourself, and you're wanting input from someone who is supposed to know what's going on and you're not getting any help.

My understanding was that the networking was there ... but when one tried to hook up to it, it was very difficult.

Some types of networking [have to occur] at the agency level, rather than the work level. The Extension Service [has to] work out some agreement with these other agencies.

I've had the experience of trying to hook up with other agencies and have had a difficult time getting them to share information. I was here opening myself up to this agency and spilling everything out because I'm overwhelmed with the situation that I was in ... and have them tell me, "I'm sorry, but that's private, and I can't share that with you." I had to dig all the information out myself where I shouldn't have had to do it. The cooperation isn't there like it should be. I have always felt like [the agency] felt that you were a client, or something [rather than a staff member].

It's easy to get buried [as the cooperator]. Extension doesn't get appropriate credit. ... People say, "Gee, Extension just provided wonderful resources, you did a great job," ... but then it's buried as far as being Ramsey County Extension, University of Minnesota. Maybe we need to develop skills in how to get [proper recognition].

PARTNERSHIPS WITH COMMUNITY EDUCATION. The suggestion was made that Ramsey County Extension should explore a partnership with Community Education in various school districts:

If there were a better partnership with Community Education and various school districts in the county, people would realize more what Extension has to offer and would be able to use their services better.

There might be a possibility of making Extension more visible and its services more widely available by cooperating with the various community education programs. [Extension could] have some of what you do as part of their curriculum ... and provide resource people ... or help develop programs with them.

I hope that you have down the suggestion about tapping into community education ... to offer Extension programs because I think that would increase the visibility of them.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Suggestions for future program direction for the Ramsey County Extension Service emerged from discussions of related questions during the interviews, and the question:

In your opinion, what specific audiences should receive the highest priority from Extension in this day of scarce resources?

The participants' opinions about future directions are presented for the following topics: (1) Current Programs; (2) Audiences; (3) Needs of People; (4) Program Access; and (5) A Programming Dilemma.

CURRENT PROGRAMS. The prevailing opinion was that the CONSUMER EDUCATION program should be continued and improved. The major problem was seen as a lack of adequate staff to handle the inquiries from consumers and the referrals from the University of Minnesota, the public libraries, the media, and from commercial and non-profit agencies.

I'd like to see [Extension] continue the [Home Economics] consumer answering program which isn't a high priority right now. ... but, I really see a need for that [program] to continue. People want research-based information and they like to talk to agents.

If I call [one of the Extension Agents], I know them from repeated contact that I can at least trust their judgment [about consumer questions].

I didn't know what to do to get rid of the ants in my kitchen ... so I called the University of Minnesota and paid a fee, but I wanted the information.

[Extension] has been getting calls from the librarians if they have questions they can't answer. Sometimes they call the University and the University gives [the caller] the ANSWER-U number. but, here again, we need more volunteers. It's almost impossible to handle more than 15 or 16 calls in an afternoon where you have to look up the information. If you have a home economist at your elbow, and can interrupt them with their work to answer the questions, it goes faster. ... they can identify a bulletin, some data, or somewhere to look that helps answer the questions.

We in the library field were disappointed that the call-in service sponsored by [Extension] was cut back a few years ago because of budget cuts. I think that program should be looked at again [with] the possibility of expansion and making it more available.

I think we could do a better job of providing education to consumers. Often times, people don't want to understand how and why the problem [they are calling about] occurred, and how [the solution] is going to work. They want to know how to solve their problem right now.

Some education on how volunteers can follow through on consumer questions with some education [would be appropriate]. I think that is something the Extension Agents know, but perhaps the Master Gardener and ANSWER-U volunteers don't always know what they can do. ... that is part of the training that needs to be done.

There was unanimous opinion that the EXPANDED FOOD AND NUTRITION EDUCATION program is relevant and valued by low-income and minority families. The areas where needed improvements were cited were in the areas of strengthening cooperation among the agencies working with low-income families, and strengthening the staffing and funding for the program. The use of ethnic EFNEP workers with minority families was applauded.

I definitely think that the [EFNEP] programs dealing with the Indo-Chinese are relevant and need to be expanded.

Single parent families with small children now more than ever need an [EFNEP] type program that Extension can offer.

There are people who really need those basic practical skills. EFNEP [workers] may even [have] to take people to the grocery store and show them how to shop.

The EFNEP program staff are so wonderful, I would like to see more of them. ... I know that it's only a part-time position, and I know that some of the workers are putting in full-time hours and not getting paid for it. There was a period of time when there was a very limited staff when I felt really guilty about calling EFNEP because I knew they were

at half staff. Part of [this staffing problem] was due to the federal funding. I can relate from our program, it's very difficult dealing with federal funds ... you don't always know when, if, and how much is going to be coming through. I think that's real difficult in program planning and maintenance of a program.

I was expressing the frustration that EFNEP workers feel [about] the cooperation [from other agencies] that isn't there as it should be. I have had the experience of trying to hook up with other agencies and have had a difficult time getting them to share information on families.

I would really like to see the 4-H and [EFNEP] nutrition program be continued, especially when you have an ethnic person who leads those groups. It is very helpful to my community.

The 4-H YOUTH DEVELOPMENT program projected the strongest identity and sense of stability of the six program areas at the time of the study. Participants believed that 4-H has high visibility as a program, and provided testimony regarding the value of the program. There seemed to be the assumption that the program would and should continue. The program was recognized as innovative and as keeping up with the times. However, concerns for the future were identified: relying on volunteer leadership as competition for volunteers increases; extending 4-H in urban areas, and to youth most in need; reaching teen-age youth, and in particular boys; and expanding the 4-H image so urban youth can identify with the program.

When I hear [the term] Extension Service, I think 4-H. ... Everybody knows about 4-H, but that's for rural kids. ... I think [Extension] could do a better job in reaching some of those harder to reach, whether it be economic or ethnic audiences. ... What if the Extension [office] were located on the west side of St. Paul or in the Selby-Dale area? Some way I think [Extension] has to reach these neighborhoods. ... 4-H is trying to publicize the program in the metro area because so many people say, "I didn't know there was a 4-H program."

The project areas are trying to keep up with the changes [in society]. We've added the computer. ... The foods and nutrition committee is looking at adding a segment on microwave cooking because microwaves are now so common in so many homes. ... 4-H has picked up on biking and is offering a very good biking program. ... I've been particularly interested in studying ways of integrating severely handicapped and non-handicapped children in 4-H activities. ... 4-H is starting to do more with the community centers, offering many 6-hour programs.

[Ramsey County was] the first in our state to have a County [4-H] Arts-In program ... I don't know if 4-H in the Classroom originated here in Ramsey County, but with the metro area, it has to be innovative ... They even have a horsemanship project for handicapped youth. They pair up an able-bodied youth with a handicapped youth; they go to some ranch and go horseback riding.

As we get more people interested [in 4-H], how do we find the volunteers to work with them -- that's a definite thing that has to follow if you get the people [interested in the program], you have to have the volunteers to work with them. ... I think that's a big problem with Extension -- you get kids who are interested, but try to find the adult leaders to give leadership. ... We need to be aware now that there are so many single families, and if we get their kids in the program, we have to somehow work with the single parent so that they can feel like they are contributing to the program without increasing their stress level to a great extent too.

I keep wondering if 4-H has any part in dealing with some of the real issues of young people such as alcohol and drug abuse, teen pregnancy, teen suicide. ... Just seems to me that Extension [and 4-H] have always stayed away from things that are controversial. I don't think that's always good. There are these controversial areas that we should be getting involved with. ... Maybe one of the reasons that we are losing teens in 4-H is that 4-H --- to me, and this may be erroneous -- does not address major issues of youth under stress. I don't think that 4-H deals with the issues kids are facing. ... What do you do for the teenage boy when he is about 14 and feels he is too old for 4-H? ... I'm concerned about positive leadership opportunities for youth, and it's the leadership area that I think 4-H has the greatest area of contribution to make.

I find the hardest thing [to do in 4-H] is communicating with the families and members all of the opportunities that are there [for them]. Even though I have a fairly good knowledge about the program, how do I best communicate [what the opportunities are]?

The primary strength attributed to the HOME STUDY GROUP program was the socialization value provided to group members, many of whom are older women. The educational programs are considered to be well organized and involved with current issues [but which may be of more interest to other age groups]. The major problems cited by the interview participants involve attracting younger women, and providing interesting programs for middle-aged and retired women.

We have older women in our group that need the social contact [provided by the Study Group]. ... many times they wouldn't participate if they didn't have that social contact. ... A lot of middle aged women have lost their husbands. ... Everyone in our group is over 50 ... One lady is in her 80s and suffering from cancer, and it is extremely important for her to participate because she is depressed [because of her chemotherapy] ...

We have toyed with the idea of having a separate program for the young women, but funding was not available to do that. I think that would be good because this past month the Home Study Group Lesson was on Child Care, and there is no one in our group who has young children anymore.

I'm not familiar with this program, how do you reach people? None of my neighbors have ever been involved in the Homemakers [program].

[Our Home Study Group club] is losing interest because we are not getting enough programs that we are interested in. ... I think it is too bad that we haven't been allowed to have more crafts [programs] because we have women who might be encouraged to [do them] in the Home Study Group setting who wouldn't go to a craft store. It's one more thing that some of them [can learn to do in their later years. ... I think that more time could be spent on foods and nutrition; we are now allowed one nutrition lesson a year. There's so much emphasis on health that we need to expand the program on health and exercise. ... One thing that our group was not particularly interested in was "Public Funding for Education." We don't have children in schools anymore. ... Does the Extension Service offer specific programs for the retired age person? ... I know two people who are very lonely ... There are support groups. ... But, getting into contact with a support group is kind of difficult for people ... they don't know where to go.

The HORTICULTURE/AGRICULTURE RELATED program was discussed primarily in terms of the Master Gardener's activities and of the amount of time required for filling a vacant Horticulture Agent position [six months at the time of the study]. Enthusiasm and support for the Master Gardener's program was expressed by the participants. The major problems cited dealt with the absence of a staff member to work with the Horticulture program and a lack of publicity about the program.

Talk about expanding -- that's what the Master Gardener's program has done. [The program] started about 9 years ago, and before that I don't know where people got all their information. Now there's 50 Master Gardeners at least who are answering telephones, and staffing the markets. ... You can count on us [Master Gardeners] to work every morning, five days a week starting in April through the end of September answering questions and relieving the Extension Agent [of this work load].

I think that there is a big need for horticulture [programs]. ... With our aging population, I think that gardening is very helpful -- if not for food, but also for or a hobby or interest that will continue. It also improves the value of the property, and it's important for some retired people who are on short budgets to contribute to their income. ... and it helps keep you limber from arthritis. ... Many people are gardening now that haven't been, and many more should be growing some of their own food. ... I think of all the chemicals that are used and it is extremely important that that kind of information is readily available to both the market gardeners and the Master Gardeners.

We've been handicapped in that [Ramsey County Extension] has not had a Horticulture Agent for over six months. ... I certainly would not want to see that position eliminated. ... People will soon decide that it's not worth taking time to call [or come in to the office] if there is nobody there. ... We say [Extension] has a horticulture program, but yet there is nobody there to do the program.

> The lack of publicity has been a weakness the past few years. ... I'm sure that people moving into the county are not aware that there is much help for them in home gardens.

The OUTREACH HOME ECONOMICS program was not recognized as a separate program thrust by the focus group participants. Enthusiasm was expressed about individual activities -- which tend to be one-time events or projects -- by those who had used them. Observations pertaining to future directions for this program emphasis per se did not emerge from the group.

AUDIENCES. Who is or should be served by the Ramsey County Extension Service? The observations and suggestions of interview participants dealt with three general audiences: (1) the adults and youth who are interested in current Extension programs; (2) the adults and youth who could benefit from participation in Extension programs (i.e., those who "need" the program); and (3) staff members of county and community agencies who could use the Ramsey County Extension Service in achieving the goals and objectives of their agencies.

The CURRENT AUDIENCES served by Ramsey County Extension include consumers, youth involved in 4-H activities and clubs, market and family gardeners, homemakers in Home Study Groups, and low-income families and volunteers. Consumers request information to assist them in solving problems and decision making. 4-H youth learn life skills which are unavailable to them or supplement what they learn in the family and in school. Gardeners are interested in effective techniques for producing and marketing food and solving other horticultural problems. Homemakers participate in Home Study Groups for education and socialization benefits. Low-income family members receive assistance in practical nutrition and other homemaking problems from EFNEP workers. Volunteers are trained to extend the resources of the full time staff to the entire county. The general perception that program participants value their skill, knowledge, and competence acquired through Extension programs is reported elsewhere.

Implications for AUDIENCES WHO COULD BENEFIT from participating in the Ramsey County Extension program emerged from the focus group interviews. Among the opinions and suggestions:

> If you look at the population [of Ramsey County], we have a population that is more diverse [than it is in rural areas]. We have people who maybe can't read who could be potential consumers, and we have people that are very highly educated who go to the University [directly].

> I don't have to worry about who's eligible to make a referral to Ramsey County [Extension]. ... Most agencies have an income eligibility [requirement for participation]. ... [Services] are either according to income or according to age ... and this way, too many people are falling through the cracks now in terms of services. To have a service [from Ramsey County Extension] that I don't have to worry about eligibility [for the participant] is amazing, it's a wonderful service, and will ripple out the effectiveness of the service.

I'm sorry to see that the human element doesn't get talked about these days. Our [clients] are often very stressed by dealing with a large bureaucracy and a system they're unfamiliar with ... if we can find ways that help them learn ... I would say that 99% of our [clients] are willing to learn what is expected of them, want to know, want to do a job, want to live a good life just like everyone else does. ... I don't think that we have looked as sensitively as we could have at how to communicate. [There is] very clearly a language and cultural barrier with 80% of our population.

The young working, non-traditional family is a concern:

I think we have to be aware of the number of single-parent families, and the number of two-parent families where both parents are working.

I was going to suggest focusing [more] on non-traditional families, since we're trying to keep the family unit cohesive.

The Home Council was trying to encourage more younger homemakers to participate.

One of the things that is a problem in my life is that many of the things that are set up as after school programs still involve transportation ... a child with a working parent who could most use [the program] probably can't get there because nobody can take your child.

More effort could be placed on finding one-parent families, and doing work with them. They don't always make contact themselves ... There is material that is relevant for them with a little adjustment.

We've had a problem reaching the very young family ... we are not meeting the needs of [that age group].

We need to be aware that there are many single parent families. ... If their kids take part in the program, we have to work with that single parent so that she can feel like she is contributing to the program without increasing her stress level to too great an extent.

And, there are youth who are not reached --

I was thinking about how appropriate it was to continue to expand [the 4-H] program [knowing] the time of these kids ... who have so many things going for them in school ... is so limited. By the same token, there are a lot of kids who have nothing to do ... so we have to figure out some way of getting out to the kids who need it.

What do you do for the teenage boy when he is about 14 and feels he is too old for 4-H? Kids have problems with what to do or they're in child care programs [when their parents work] ... after school seems to be an excellent time for some programs [for them].

A pregnant teenager is probably not going to find a good project in 4-H that will help her develop her parenting skills.

We have 30 to 40 Hmong and Laotian youth in our club of 90 members, but they don't come as frequently as our kids do. ... our youngsters have learned to be more friendly, and [the Hmong and Laotian] are in our cooking groups. They're terrific in acting, they're picking up on crafts.

I have been interested in studying ways of integrating severely handicapped and non-handicapped children in 4-H activities.

The retirement age audience was also mentioned:

I keep thinking there are more and more retired people. Does [Ramsey County] Extension offer specific programs to the retired age person?

My [concerns for needed programs] are with the elderly.

The well being of the elderly [is a concern of mine].

Elderly people taking care of elderly parents ... that's what we have gone through.

I was thinking about ... being alert to the needs [of the elderly] and help them with problem solving.

Statistics prove that there are more elderly now and will be in the future than there will be children. I think it's very important that we find [programs] for them.

It's 40 years in the range of an older person ... if you go from 60 you see accounts of people who have passed their 100th birthday ... there's a young elderly, and an older elderly, and their potential for doing things varies a great deal.

There are a lot of middle aged women ... and men ... who have lost their [spouses], yet know only certain skills, and have to take care of themselves.

I think that our aging population [could benefit from] gardening programs -- if not for food, but also as an interest that will continue. ... and as a way to contribute to their income or to their [food] stock.

I'm not sure what Ag [Ramsey County Extension] does for seniors, and I don't know that they should.

There are also ethnic and minority audiences --

I want to bring out that Ramsey County Extension needs to relate more to ethnic groups, and [find ways of helping] them feel that they can be part of [Extension programs].

We have minority people that we deal with ... who are very willing to learn.

We talk about the Hispanics and the Southeast Asians that don't speak English ... but there is another group who has very limited literacy [skills]. ... It's a very large group.

About 80% of our [clients] are Southeast Asians, most of them Hmong. They are from a very rural area, and we have found some problems with cultural and language barriers. We are trying to help them learn our ways without changing their culture so much that they don't have their own identity ... [they need assistance with] housekeeping skills and need [knowledge about] housekeeping standards.

[The Indo-Chinese] population needs to be a focus in view of the fact that other kinds of governmental support for this group seems to be dwindling ... they're not the "in group" anymore in getting extensive federal financial resources ... yet they continue to be a major group in need of community services. ... as basic as homemaking skills, and services to assure that their children remain in the school system so the children do not experience the difficulties in health and self-support that their parents and grandparents did.

I think [Ramsey County Extension] has to reach the people on the west side of St. Paul and in the Selby-Dale areas. [Currently], I see the [Ramsey County] Extension Service serving a white ethnic group, just that.

There are [educational] needs in the inner city [that Ramsey County Extension could serve].

Participation and involvement would be greater [for low-income youth and adults] if there were satellite offices in areas where they are. ... It would be really great to have an office at the Martin Luther King Center.

Parents, single people, and middle-class families were also mentioned- We also have the responsibility of educating parents [about] the parenting process.

I think that teaching parents to feed their children properly makes those children healthier and helps the whole economy.

I see single people [needing information about] nutrition and health. I think about single people who are too old for 4-H ... some of them are ready for leadership skills that they weren't ready for when they were younger.

There are a lot of average families with a moderate type lifestyle who I think are confused as to what to do with some problems.

I do think that there are average middle-class families who don't know what resources they have. ... If you are in the poor category, you can get picked up by some of the agencies who can assist you.

I think there's an audience, and I don't want to say it's the middle-class audience, between those individuals who are receiving a lot of services at present and those that are pretty self-sufficient and self-reliant. ... [I think] that we can help the people that are on the verge of going either direction.

People in families who are very busy, perhaps have children.

AGENCY STAFF MEMBERS comprise yet another general audience for the Ramsey County Extension Service --

In working with other groups, Extension has done well in the information area ... writing literature, and so on.

Maybe the key is in [Ramsey County] Extension becoming the staff development provider for those of us in the media and county agencies to become more enlightened with the educational resources that are available.

If [Ramsey County] Extension can do anything about our [agency's] need to learn [about another culture] and to understand and be able to communicate in another language, it would be something that I would like to see expanded.

We come to you for resources and maybe even training for people who can provide [resources].

The newsletter [that carries Ron Pitzer's columns] is a very helpful publication. I don't know anyone [else] who disseminates that type of information ... the information is tremendous [for] the single parents support groups we do ... All sorts of people are picking it up and using it and may not know that [it is an Extension publication].

Working with [Ramsey County] Extension ... in developing materials ... would be an efficient use of services and provide an overall community approach.

I think Extension has a wonderful ability to be a non-partisan convener of agencies [in the community].

I'd like to support the idea of "joint programming" where organizations join together to plan [and offer programs].

<u>NEEDS OF PEOPLE.</u> The needs of people have traditionally been used to determine what educational activities are offered by the Extension Service. In order to ascertain what representatives of the general public saw as the needs of people in late January - early February, 1987, the moderator asked two groups of potential users to respond to the following request:

Our lives and communities are complex today. I would like for you to think about your own situation and also that of your friends and others in the community. Listed on the sheet that I am passing around are four broad categories that affect almost everyone. Take a few minutes and write down any concerns, problems or issues that are important to you. I will be collecting these later.

[The four categories were: ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, ENVIRONMENT AND NATURAL RESOURCES, HUMAN DEVELOPMENT AND COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP. These four areas currently define the focus of the Minnesota Extension Service.]

The majority of the needs identified dealt with the HUMAN DEVELOPMENT area. In this category, the needs of ADULTS involved nutrition, health, and wellness; mental health; family life; financial management; career education; safety; housing; and the elderly. A miscellaneous group included some unrelated needs which were identified by the interview participants.

The NUTRITION, HEALTH AND WELLNESS category received the largest number of mentions:

I think there should be a lot of education in the area of nutrition and health. ... at all age levels, but [especially] at middle age and older ... nutrition ... nutrition and health ... as it relates to single people ... [and] for the black community ... teaching people how to shop for nutritious foods rather than feeding your family junk food ... nutrition and foods in general are something that we could stress more.

We need to expand the program on health and exercise. ... exercise programs ... getting enough exercise ... healthy living ... health and well being.

Treating your body respectfully in terms of drug abuse and alcohol abuse. ... Alcohol is another problem [and] cigarettes is another drug. Those are two problems that have to be faced. Somebody's going to have to say alcohol is a drug as is nicotine and [they're] addictive. ... An area that jumps out [for me is the] chemically dependent. ... We're seeing the typical suburban housewife that doesn't have anything to do getting hooked on and misusing prescription drugs [and who] are sedated out there. ... Most people don't know what drugs are. There's a problem that is surfacing -- the misappropriation of legal drugs. ... Drug education ... drug programs.

I think some way the community has to address the AIDS situation through education. ... Another area that I think Extension ought to be involved in is the AIDS issue. There is no question that the illness is growing. Faster than the system is responding to the needs of people [for information about that illness]. Policy makers are still somewhat reticent to deal with the educational aspects of that issue.

The MENTAL HEALTH needs of adults were also cited frequently:

> I think suicide and depression is a major issue. ... Just simply coping with daily stress. ... Also mental fitness. ... The surprising number of suicides among professional people. No one knows what "happy" is. Happy is when you're a kid; you're not happy when you're old. ... An adult that I know [committed suicide]; her point was, "I can't take this anymore, I'm trying to be professional, I'm trying to keep my family together, I'm trying to do all these things, I can't do it, I'm falling." ... I know two people who are going through divorces and they're very lonely. ... Getting into support groups for the divorcees or for the grieving is difficult for people; they don't know where to go. ... Talking about suicide made me think of the middle class; the expectations that are put on these people that they are not going to achieve [leads to] stress and suicide and depression.

The FAMILY LIFE category included issues and concerns related to parent education, child abuse and basic homemaking skills --

> Another important area right now is parenting. ... It would be good to have more family programs because the nuclear family is so broken out now. ... New demands on youth and their parents.

> With child abuse, I can see [Extension] picking up on the education of adults and some kind of an identification program. ... Are there programs for children [or adults who have been abused] to learn to cope with what happened so they can get past those feelings? They say that people who are subject to [child abuse] turn around and abuse their children. So that becomes something to prevent from becoming an ongoing problem. ... [Among] the county needs, I also see child abuse. I listed vital needs of youth, something pertaining to small children and single parents. ... Just child care. ... Day care. ... Child care services primarily. ... The need for good child care.

> We need to keep up with population demographics, find ways to inform super busy people on things such as sewing, things people need. ... Just basic survival skills, basics in the kitchen and food budgeting. ... There are a lot of families who don't know how to clean their homes or how to cook certain meals for their children [or avoid] spending a lot of money for things they don't need for the household ... Many of the things that are taught by Extension used to be learned from your mother; [certain populations] just don't get that education at home. ... Home economics is not required like it used to be in schools, so education at all [age] levels [is needed].

> One of the frustrations that [EFNEP] program assistants face is that you are sent to do nutrition education. But, once you get into the home [of a low-income family], you cannot ignore the other needs that are there. You cannot just close your ears and say, "I just didn't hear," when she asks me "How do I get someone to help me deal with the utility company?" If they're cold, they aren't going to listen [to any nutrition education].

FINANCIAL PLANNING AND MANAGEMENT was another area where needs were identified:

> Financial training dealing with daily expenses of life. ... I'm very aware that credit cards are becoming a real problem. ... I would not [want to see] cut out the information programs such as financial planning. ... Financial Planning. ... Financial stability for moderate income levels, also a concern with the role of money in our society. ... I work with the homeless, and they have absolutely no idea of what to do with their paycheck.

In the area of CAREERS, the following needs were identified:

> What about career training? Job training...For the poor, for people who need basic skills. ... Women's role in the work place and its continuing challenges. ... Career and life changes. ... Making career changes without support. ... Help with people who are trying to make career choices. ... Personal goal-setting and attainment. ... Career change. ... For all ages. ... Balancing work and family living. ... Time management for parents who both work and have families; I think that would be very difficult. ... I see pay equity as a need.

SAFETY was another concern for some participants:

> Safety, I'd like to see some first aid courses for parents of young children. I don't know how many parents know how to prevent their child from choking. ... I would say an economical course on safety in the home. ... I would like to see education on how important the seat belt and child restraint laws are for children and adults.

And, HOUSING was addressed --

> Under housing and energy [I see needs for] how to economize on electricity and gas in the home; but I live in a mobile home, and see nothing to help. ... For people shopping for homes, it would be nice to have some guidelines that deal with some of those problems that you encounter ... the homeless [is a concern]. ... Housing for the poor. ... In our case, it's maintaining an older home.

Concerns were expressed about the ELDERLY population as a group:

> The well being of the elderly; is the nursing home the ultimate for the elderly? ... Elderly people taking care of elderly parents. ... How to be alert to their needs and to help them with problem solving. ... Tending to the elderly. ... Alternatives to nursing home care; home care and home services. ... Societal trends and concerns as it pertains to the graying of the population; how's it's going to affect the work place -- employment, medical assistance, and assimilating them into society and the work place.

Additional ideas expressed about the needs of adults were placed in MISCELLANEOUS category:

I'll mention responsible decision making for everybody.

I think adult education [is a need] as a major tool in shaping society's thoughts and patterns. ... Adult education [pertaining to] how to participate in government and public decision making processes.

Art, as it pertains to the black community; definitely art is being lost and not appreciated.

[Information] to help new people when they move in to a new community to feel more comfortable.

Concerns in the HUMAN DEVELOPMENT area that pertained to YOUTH were also identified by the focus group interview participants. Suggestions were categorized in the following categories: Mental Health, Alcohol and Drug Abuse, Life skills, Preparing for Work, Sex Education and Miscellaneous. Comments about MENTAL HEALTH were most numerous:

Maybe one of the reasons 4-H is losing teenagers is that it does not address the major issues of youth under stress, the issues that kids are facing. ... I'm very concerned about the pressure put on young people to be best in whatever their sport is.

A young person had committed suicide two doors down from our classroom last year. Seeing the stress and the things that are going on in kid's lives, there's so much going on in this busy world that something has to happen. ... My child in junior high was involved [with a suicide]. His reaction was that [the youth] must have been having a lot of trouble getting along with other kids, and probably was feeling very pressured at school. ... I can understand what pressure points are. ... The hype now is with the youth. It seems that depression and suicide issues could be all ages. ... I think kids get lonely when they get home from school [and a parent isn't home]; maybe they don't have a sport. ... We have a lot of latch key kids that are coming home and sitting at home alone.

We see the phenomenal growth of suicide in the 15 to 24 age bracket in the communities and in the suburbs. Suicide used to be death by misadventure by people in lower economic scales. Now we're seeing it [due to] frustration; fulfillment isn't reached, and yet these are supposedly successful people.

I would say summer programs for the children of working parents. ... I think, along with the school, [Extension] should do constructive things outside the structure at school in an after-school program [to help young people do something] with their time.

ALCOHOL AND DRUG ABUSE is another problem area for youth --

There's a need in the area of drug abuse [especially in the area of awareness -- bringing it to people's minds. ... I see an educational role for Extension in that you're already working with youth in dealing

with health issues; that's a natural tie-in with any chemical abuse. ... I think it starts way before the 6th grade, and this may be a niche for Extension; by helping people gain self esteem and communication skills, maybe later they will not find drugs quite so attractive. ... some of the real young people issues are alcohol and drug abuse. ... Young daughters start getting a little uptight and start taking Mommy's or Auntie's Perkedan or Valium; there's another area of education that we're going to have to address. ... Kids lean on the [adult] role models who use [alcohol or prescription drugs] when they feel uptight; kids see that and hear that that is acceptable.

Acquiring LIFE SKILLS was viewed as another area of need for youth:

Some of these kids don't have any involvement with learning to cook and clean and participate in plays and demonstrations and public speaking. ... I think there's an urgent need since many schools no longer emphasize home economics; whether it's sewing or cooking, I think that's a great need in our area now. I have no idea how to advise people where to go [for these subjects]. ... In fact there were no sewing classes taught in my high school [last year] so sewing is not really being taught much at the high school level. ... The kids aren't choosing to take home economics for various reasons. ... We used to think of learning [these skills] from your mother or someone else in the home; you just don't get that education at home, not with a certain population. ... Learning basic skills doesn't seem as appropriate in the Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts. ... I think [Extension] is trying to upgrade these "traditional projects" because if they aren't taught, they are going to be lost totally. People choose to learn and not to learn those basic [life skills], but I think it's good to have them available for those who do want to have that base knowledge.

PREPARATION FOR WORK was also an area of concern for youth ---

Job opportunities for young people, particularly teenagers who have trouble breaking into the job market. And also education for employers [to help them] realize that young people can be good employees. ... I think developing job opportunities for young people -- teenagers -- [is a need]. ... I think that's great that teenagers go to work. ... It isn't just an issue of making money; it help them define their talents and aspirations. I think that striking a balance between jobs, need for jobs, and a healthy environment [is important].

As was SEX EDUCATION --

A family living or sex education program is there and available to kids... Sexual education programs [are needed].

A MISCELLANEOUS category includes the following additional issues identified for youth:

Young people are much more prone to heart disease today than they have been in the past. I think we're poor [in terms] of fitness from the waist up.

I've seen a teenage boy feel he is too old for 4-H a number of times, including my son.

We're trying to get the neighborhood crime watch program to youth in grades 6 through 9.

The ENVIRONMENT AND NATURAL RESOURCES category included several concerns participants had about their lives and communities. The following needs in the area of CONSERVATION and recycling were cited:

Most of my concerns would be in the broad area of conservation and recycling, be it solid waste or otherwise. ... I'm strong on education [for] people on how to conserve, how to recycle. ... Slow down the need for landfill areas by making it mandatory to recycle glass and metals and by encouraging composting of grass clippings, leaves. ... I am interested in incentives to protect the environment, such as deposits on cans, bottles and tax incentives, and fines on communities. ... My concern is conservation. ... Add me to the recycling [list of issues]. ... Recycling. ... I'd like more education on recycling. My mother-in-law lives in a mobile home park where they have to divide their trash. I'd like to see general home owners [do the same]. ... It seems to me we've knocked down a lot of trees for construction of new homes and filling wetlands. How are we going to maintain our environment for future generations to enjoy? ... Maintain the reforestation programs.

There were also concerns about CLEAN WATER AND AIR:

Clean water and air, where are we disposing of the wastes? And, what long-range effect will it have? ... I'm concerned about supporting the clean water act, learning about acid rain, and letting your feelings be known to your legislators. ... Ramsey County consists of 168 square miles of which 16 1/2 are water surfaces; 10 percent of this county is lake. ... I had [clean] water [as a concern. ... Clean air [and] water ...

And ENERGY --

I'd like to see some incentives for wind-generated electricity and solar energy as opposed to nuclear power. ... I am interested in alternative energy sources. ... People complaining about the heating bills are talking about energy.

The replenishment of WILDLIFE was a concern:

There isn't a comprehensive plan for maintaining state fisheries or replenishing the wildlife; yet people are encouraged to come to Minnesota to fish. ... I have wildlife [as a concern]. ... And the fish. ... Forest and wildlife areas.

OTHER concerns in the area of Environment and Natural Resources included:

I see a need for neighborhood public hearings on environmental noise

pollution, things like airport noise that have developed since we bought our house in 1975.

The erosion of land ... with 3 wheelers or snowmobiles ... just churning up these hills, the water is going to come down and wash out the [tracks] ... people don't realize what they do when they misuse the land.

Forest and land use [are concerns of mine].

I had a concern about pesticide control as it relates to water and agriculture and fish and wildlife.

Participants found the ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT area a difficult category to identify concerns and issues. "I wasn't quite sure how to respond," one participant said. However, the following concerns were identified in the area of JOB OPPORTUNITIES:

I'm thinking of people who need jobs in the city. ... The notion of economic development for minority groups, blacks or Asians or American Indians or Hispanics. ... I have developing job opportunities for young people, teenagers. ... I am concerned about economic development for minority groups; there's high unemployment rates for black people, Asians, Hispanics, and American Indians. ... Job opportunities for teenagers who have trouble breaking into the job market, and also education for employers [to help them] realize that teenagers can be good employees. ... I am reminded that older people need a place to be, and do, and work; there's a current [television] commercial about an elderly man going to work. ... I'm concerned about striking a balance between [providing] jobs, the need for jobs, and a healthy environment.

And, in the area of RECREATION AND TOURISM:

I would like to see something offered to help families plan family vacations with your children that don't cost a bundle of money where you can go and enjoy your family life. ... I think that we have a responsibility to help people [in Ramsey County] to know about low-cost, close-to-home opportunities for recreation that they may have. ... I find that a lot of the leaders are pushing for tourism and the native people are not for it at all; [that suggests a need for] education for the right kind of recreation.

The area of AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION AND DISTRIBUTION was on the minds of some participants --

I'm really concerned about [the future of] food and fiber in this country. I'm frightened that I'm going to wake up one of these days with nothing in the grocery stores. I work day and night now in the inner city practically feeding 150 families off the food shelves, and I don't see any end to it.

Gardening and agriculture as it relates to groups like the Hmong population. A lot of training could be provided for them.

I'd like to see more people in the urban environment exposed to agricultural education and development and programs, so they could learn where [their food] comes from.

My concerns are tied to the agricultural supply and demand situation.

I see a need for [a better] world wide food distribution system. ... lots of people are concerned, but they don't know one single action they can take.

I feel that we need to think more creatively about the use of agricultural land ... what other uses might the land be used for [other than growing more wheat or grain]? The farm crisis [is a concern].

We're overproducing in this country.

The proper use and management of our lands ... getting some of the land back [from large corporations] into private ownership.

The COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP category drew comments on issues and concerns from the participants in three general areas: (1) leadership development, (2) involvement in public affairs, and (3) involvement of youth in social concerns. As for LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT -

If I had to pick just one issue related to the black community, emerging leadership would be my greatest concern. ... An interest to me is the development of our youth leadership, I think that should be built into whatever people are doing in the community just to enable youth to interact with people who are older and [have] more experience. ... How to be a group leader. I think a lot of young people starting out don't know how to lead a group, how to help them with long-range planning, how to get input, how to develop teamwork, and how to develop tasks and subcommittees. ... Developing minority leaders. ... 4-H develops leadership skills and encourages young people to give their time and talents to others; I'm concerned if [Ramsey County Extension] cuts programs and this wouldn't continue. ... There are no classes in school on how to be a leader. ... I listed workshops [in leadership] for interested people.

The concerns about public INVOLVEMENT IN PUBLIC AFFAIRS were --

It's legislative involvement and comprehension. I think the average citizen has a lot of trouble trying to figure out what the legislative impacts are, and how they work. ... [I'm concerned about people] just becoming more involved in the political process, or making changes in their neighborhood or communities, or starting own [activity or service] if there is a need instead of waiting, wishing that it would be supplied. I know of one rural community where there was a real need and no facilities or human services coming around, [so] they developed their own program. ... I put down getting our elected officials to know our wishes better. ...Communication to and from elected officials and

leaders. ... I think we need to develop leaders [who can have an impact on] legislation. ... If you want legislative action, you have got to get people in on the political process. ... Understanding governmental impact. ... I see a need for adult education on how to participate in government and public decision making processes. ... I'm concerned about progressive legislation to keep pace with social issues particularly.

There were issues related to INVOLVEMENT OF YOUTH IN SOCIAL CONCERNS in the community:

I think [an issue is] keeping youth involved in social concerns. ... How to train children in the democratic process as they are growing up via school systems and the local community structure such as youth programs. ... I think it would be good for 4-H junior leaders to volunteer time with a volunteer community agency such as Meals on Wheels. ... There isn't a community, just people coming and going, and not even knowing each other.

PROGRAM ACCESS. How Extension delivers its educational programs to the people and the barriers to participation that face potential users affect how accessible the program is to county residents. References to HOW programs could be delivered were made by the interview participants:

As we look at the busyness of people, we need to really look at how [Ramsey County Extension] delivers its message ... and consider going into the work place to do programs, using more media, using more correspondence courses.

This computer program can go on because so many people have computers in their homes now. ... One of these days everybody will have their own personal terminal and modem, and will be able to access [computerized data bases].

I think that cable programming and the entire video approach could be expanded much more. Think of all of the workshops that are going on at the Ramsey County Extension Office. Get that stuff videotaped so we can get it on cable and the public can see it.

I've been exposed to [the Home Study Groups programs] through the video.

The single parents' support group newsletter ... that has been very helpful in dealing with single parents ... something like this should continue. ... I don't know anyone [else] who is disseminating that information. ... All sorts of people are picking it up and using it. ... I've never met [Ron Pitzer] either, but I've swiped his stuff for my outreach.

And WHERE programs could be offered ---

I think satellite [offices] ought to be placed out in areas where low

income people are, because there are things that hamper their being a part of a program [at the Ramsey County Extension Office location].

I think it would be wonderful [for Ramsey County Extension] to be co-housed with other organizations ... perhaps not every day, but that an Extension Agent would be in certain offices in the downtown area or over in the Rosedale area or wherever, like the doctors are.

[Satellite offices] would help us with our linkages with other organizations. I think it would be really great to have a satellite office at the Martin Luther King Center.

I think that when you have people who are poor and who don't have much education, that the one-to-one [approach], coming into their home is excellent.

Problems with TRANSPORTATION present a barrier for some to participate:

[Some of the programs are] set up for people that can transport their children. ... When you're working, you can't do that.

Particularly in the summer ... things are during the day ... starting from 10 a.m. to noon.

Yea, transportation is a problem. Some people want to participate in a program, but how in the world would they ever get them out [to the Ramsy County Extension Office] for the summer Arts-In?

Agents transport them most of the time if that happens ... but you have to work that out.

In my community the woman doesn't drive, and these people will have to have some kind of transportation.

You take Mt. Airy, they have [programs] at the top of the hill. ... But, there's this mother at the bottom [of the hill] with 5 small children ... she can't get those 5 children up that hill even though it's 6 or 8 blocks.

I don't have to worry if I refer someone [who doesn't have transportation] to the Ramsey County Extension Service.

And, the COST of the program is an important consideration if you are trying to reach low-income youth or adults --

The course I'm taking [on safety in the home] would help, but it's expensive. I think for a young parent that would be too expensive.

[With some programs in other agencies], there's a fee involved, sometimes a really large fee. ... [Ramsey County Extension] is meeting needs of people on low or limited income that couldn't take advantage of those [programs in other agencies] that they are [unable to] buy.

To have an [educational program] that I don't have to worry about if [there is an income] eligibility requirement is amazing; it's a wonderful service.

[One of the strengths of Ramsey County Extension is] that you don't have to give your membership number or pay very much in fees, and you have all of these things available.

[Ramsey County Extension] is a county program financed by taxes, and you want to make it available to as many people as possible ... You will eliminate some if you charge.

The 4-H program charges a user fee of $5.00 now. ... And for that $5.00, [the members] get access to the whole 4-H program for the rest of the year. ... It's the same with the Home Study Group -- $6.00 for a year.

I resent that I have to pay 50 cents to talk to nobody [that I know when I use the University's consumer education call-in service]. I would rather pay the 50 cents to talk to [a Ramsey County Extension Agent].

A PROGRAMMING DILEMMA **Participants recognized that the Ramsey County Extension Service had a dilemma to resolve (1) given lack of visibility of the Ramsey County Extension Service among county residents, and (2) considering the value that participants feel they receive from Extension, (3) whose programs are offered by a staff that is viewed as very busy, if not over extended, (4) coupled with the challenge of obtaining volunteers, if (5) Extension were successful in becoming highly visible in the county:**

The Ramsey County Extension Service is the best kept secret of the 20th century.

I think that [Ramsey County Extension] needs to spend more money on advertising the fact that it's here ... telling people specific things they can get ... that's a first and real important step. I think that we're kind of frightened to do it because Ramsey County has so many people that could be using [Extension], and there is a very limited staff and resources. ... It would be an interesting risk [to take].

You realize that if you market well, you'll be a victim of your own success.

That's the problem. We get more publicity and get to reaching more people, there's going to be a need for more staff, I'm sure, because the agents are working to the limit.

PROGRAM FOCUS

Concerns about the best utilization of scarce public resources led to the following question being asked of the focus group interview participants:

What do you think should be the FOCUS of the Ramsey County Extension Service in an era of scarce resources, and where there are many public and private agencies serving the public?

Or, to put it another way, what should the Ramsey County Extension Service concentrate on in terms of the audiences who are served, the kinds of educational programs that are offered and the methods which are used?

Participants felt that (1) the focus of the Ramsey County Extension Service is unclear, (2) there is a need for the Ramsey County Extension Service to develop a program focus, and (3) the Ramsey County Extension program should focus on educational programs that address problems of urban families and youth in cooperation with other agencies and through existing programs.

RAMSEY COUNTY EXTENSION LACKS A CLEAR PROGRAM FOCUS. Participants see the dissemination of research information from many subject matter sources, and equate this with attempting to serve all of the needs of all people. Other participants just have no idea as to what the focus of Ramsey County Extension is --

I don't know what is the focus of Ramsey County Extension Service at the present time. ... What is their goal? Then you take it from there. Should this be expanded, concentrated, or revamped?

I thought the question was overwhelming because your programs cover such a broad base. That's what make you successful ... the fact that [Extension] has so much to offer as a resource.

It's that thing that you can't be all things to all people, you just can't do that. You spread yourself too thin, and the things that you do well suffer.

I can't help [but feel] that the focus [of Extension] has developed over the years and it hasn't been really directed all that much. ... That's a good point. Do they know what their focus is currently? ... Well, right now, the dissemination of information would be their main focus. ... Not if you looked at 4-H groups; there are hands-on types of learning ... you're learning. ... Home Study [Group] is information ... but it's hands-on [learning] too. ... What I am saying is that Extension, and Ramsey County specifically, has been a way of getting the research programs that are ongoing at the University out to the public, and I think that is the main focus of Extension, but how we do that is something else.

Because the origination of Extension was from the University, that's why it's become all things to all people.

RAMSEY COUNTY EXTENSION NEEDS A CLEAR PROGRAM FOCUS. Reasons were suggested why a clear program focus is needed:

All of the areas [that were discussed] are important. You need to focus [in order] to do the best job.

[Focusing would allow staff to] put their energies into doing a set number of things well, rather than doing a lot of things with mediocrity.

Is it practical ... given limited resources ... to attempt to be all things to all people?

I think it is important to be real sure of who you are and what you do ... in order to continue with the present level of funding. And to build on that in a way that you're offering a quality service that is not duplicated, that is really of use in the community, and to make sure that you educate the County Commissioners to that fact. If you start adding programs ... where others are doing that ... you get into the scramble [that] such and such an agency does that [so] you don't need the money, so therefore we can cut you a little bit here. Again, make sure that you are strong in what you do and back that up and educate.

I think that the Ramsey County Extension Service has to be real clear on who they are and what they do ... before anything external happens ... so that anything [Extension] does can be checked out as to whether a [new program] is appropriate.

All of us are aware of changes in funding. ... all of the agencies working with the United Way are changing to a program emphasis [from] their agency emphasis. The problems are going to be defined by the funders and then [the agencies] are supposed to scurry around and somehow provide that kind of programming. ... and that concerns me.

[I think that focusing would help Extension] become more timely. When Chernobyl happened last spring, Extension should have been out there with press releases ... and information to the public the next day. If it takes us six months to produce a fact sheet for the public, by that time the need [for information] is gone.

You don't want to increase the program [because] Ramsey County Extension is already strapped for personnel. [Program expansion can't occur] unless there are some drastic changes made. ... Like more money.

I think that the problem is getting over extended into too many areas

RAMSEY COUNTY EXTENSION SHOULD FOCUS. Participants offered ideas about HOW and in WHAT and with Whom. In regard to the HOW --

[Develop] a real simple mission statement [that tells] who you are and what you do.

[Ramsey County Extension] needs to identify what it is that it does and is going to do, what it has the capability of doing ... then [Extension] needs to decide what needs to be investigated, what are the needs in the county [that should be addressed], and who are the audiences that have those needs. So, we look at the audiences, we look

at their needs, and we look at Extension's resources and capabilities, and then set the priorities [for Ramsey County Extension programs].

Decide what it is that [Extension] is going to do really well, and limit what is done to those things ... and be willing to say that [Extension] doesn't do certain things.

Is there a link that works with [county government] so Ramsey County Extension is aware of where the county is putting its energies?

[By taking] an in-depth look at each program, [Extension] could see if there were some program duplication with some other agency which could be eliminated.

You need to make an assessment of a community of what is offered in the community by other agencies in order to know where there is a lack and then you can fill in.

I think that Ramsey County Extension will have to focus priorities based on some kinds of needs assessments.

It seems to me that 4-H needs to carve out that piece that nobody is really doing well and say, "This is what we can really do well that nobody else seems to be addressing." Let's do that and refer others to those who are doing the other pieces [of the program].

The opinion of the interview participants was that RAMSEY COUNTY EXTENSION SHOULD FOCUS ON EDUCATION rather than service --

Personally, I think [Extension] should continue [with the focus on] education.

Extension is real well known for its nutrition programs, and the budgeting programs. Nobody else can do them any better than they do.

It's good for [Extension] to be a teaching organization instead of a service organization, because I don't think it is perceived as providing service.

I think that the Extension Service is well known for its ability to educate. And that's where it needs to stay. I think that if you tried to provide direct service, then you would get into this area of competition and that would be a real shame. The education component should be it's real strong point, because there are not a lot of other organizations that are in that business. They educate and that can be their part in the coalition [of agencies]. That's the component the community needs in order to provide the comprehensive services [for many grants].

I think [Ramsey County Extension] should be more than a big library or a big information source. I think it should be involved in coordinating programs in the community and the resources of volunteers.

With computers, it should become easier to tap the knowledge through the University, and more time should be spent on coordinating programs and coordinating use of volunteers.

The community garden program could be one area that could be [transferred] out of Ramsey County Extension. Extension isn't providing education there any more. We collect the checks and tell them where to plant. We may have been 5 to 10 years ago when the Southeast Asians first came, but during the past two years I don't think that Extension has offered that much education. ... It appears that that is something another county department could manage, because it's a management type [of service] that is provided.

Even though the tradition of the Extension Service has been on rural needs, the focus group participants said that in Ramsey County EXTENSION SHOULD FOCUS ON URBAN needs and problems:

Should Ramsey County provide services in an urban area? Absolutely, there was no other service available to us when I started looking for resources. The residents that we were looking at came from a very rural background. Ramsey county is serving rural people in an urban setting, very definitely. ... Some come from the hills, and Cambodia, Laos, and Thailand.

Many [people in the county] have come from smaller communities in search of jobs which they didn't find or other kinds of family ties. ... We are very much affected by what happens in rural areas because people do come to the cities because of housing and resources.

You have to look at the county; it's urban, what's the choice [if you don't serve urban residents]?

Extension needs to become clearer about what their specialization and function is in a predominately urban county. I've worked with Extension for several years now [in my agency] and there is still a rural type thing that we look to for Extension [to help us with]. Are there urban-type things that Extension can be as helpful with or is their mission really the rural-type thing? I think that work needs to be done to come up very clearly about what the purpose is in an urban setting. What the University Extension function is in an urban setting confuses people.

I think that [program] development [relevant] to the urban setting must be a primary focus for Ramsey County Extension. And, I think in order to do that you need to develop an interdisciplinary [access] to the knowledge of the University beyond family, social. I know that [3-M and the University of Minnesota work very closely] in their engineering and physics departments -- a very profitable exchange of information.

While there are many audiences that have needs and problems that Ramsey County Extension could address, the participants suggested that EXTENSION SHOULD FOCUS ON FAMILIES AND YOUTH:

I think there should be an emphasis on families ... single parent families ... extended families ... the new-extended families. I think there's a lot of change going on in marriage and the family. There has to be a way to educate people about how that is affecting them ... if the adults grew up in traditional households and their kids are not. They don't know how to understand what their kids are going through.

We've got a lot of young families and a lot of young adolescents and kids who are under tremendous stress ... either because they lack money or they are from chaotic households or they are sixteen and a Mom. If you can do good nutrition services, good parenting services, good intervention services, then I think populations under stress ought to be your priority.

I see the whole child care picture as tremendously important in the next few years.

A lot of [needs] are related. If you talk about the family, you're talking about energy ... and gardening. I have worked with the gardening program, and 4-H. You start out with the kids and before you know it, you've got the whole family.

Once you're in the home, visiting with the family, and talking on a one-to-one basis, you talk about fuel bills and the lack of money to pay them as well as the information on gardening or nursing services that you [came to discuss].

I think emphasis [should be placed] on helping the poor ... and people who are going through critical life changes, be it career changes ... or becoming elderly and dependent on others.

I think that [Extension] has its best capability for working with low income and ethnic family audiences ... [Extension] has done some really good special programming for them, ... and there are materials available from the University that are targeted for those audiences.

You might want to think about things that the whole family does ... budgeting and finances should be a whole family thing ... education around family activities [would] include mother and father, include gardening, include budgeting, include work styles, especially in a county that includes both rural and urban kinds of activities.
I see the human element as being important. A lot of other agencies work with the human element, but it's very often at the crisis level. If [Extension] can work with the human element and help them avoid getting into a crisis situation, I see that as a major focus of the program.

[Children] are our future, and I think they're our first priority [for Extension].

If you address children, you're addressing parents, their families, their older brothers and sisters.

RAMSEY COUNTY EXTENSION SHOULD FOCUS ON VOLUNTEER DEVELOPMENT. Participants considered the contributions of volunteers so important and essential to the total Extension program that volunteer development should be a program emphasis for Extension:

> I think Ramsey County Extension should get more involved with the coordination of volunteers.
>
> There are these different volunteer groups that [Extension] maybe needs to tap into [to recruit additional volunteers].
>
> I can't say enough about having a formal volunteer program and the staff to do that. For example, the volunteer coordinator handles the recruitment, the recognition, the placement ... it takes time.
>
> I think the focus [of Ramsey County Extension] ... should be coordinating programs in the community and the resources of volunteers. With the emphasis on computers, it should become easier to tap the knowledge at the University ... so more time should be spent on coordinating volunteers.
>
> [Ramsey County Extension] has done some training with Ramsey County Human Services and the University of Minnesota. I've seen some combined training of volunteers and I thought it was great.

RAMSEY COUNTY EXTENSION SHOULD FOCUS ON LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT. Leadership development was another area which participants felt should receive greater emphasis from Extension:

> The leadership aspect ... I think that's so important, and I think Extension is extremely good at [doing it].
>
> [Leadership is an extremely important] area of concern. ... I don't see any easy answer ... but an ongoing effort [is needed] ... particularly as it relates to the black community. If I had to pick out just one [issue to address], I think that emerging leadership would be my greatest concern.
>
> I think a lot of young people starting out don't know how to lead a group.
> One area of interest to me is the development of our youth leadership ... anywhere it can be structured. I think [leadership] opportunities should be built into whatever people are doing in the community.
>
> Community leadership [development] will help with some of these other problems in human development [that were identified].
>
> Extension has this wonderful leadership program all put together. It bothers me that [another agency] did a lot of leg work, wrote a grant, and developed a leadership program that probably forty people have gone through at an extremely high cost in time and

grant money. The duplication of all the research and all the leg work bothers me more than the actual duplication of a program.

Within the target audience(s), RAMSEY COUNTY EXTENSION SHOULD FOCUS ON PROBLEMS, ISSUES, AND NEEDS --

I was focusing on an issue. Issues sometimes sound like it's some sort of crisis. I don't think it necessarily has to be a crisis kind of thing that [Extension] deals with.

I hear you saying, "Let's look at issues rather than program." Inherent in the program are some things that will address the issues.

[Extension programs should focus on] what the people need at the time.

That's the way I view the future. ... and we're going to deal with issues and concerns.

When it comes to program delivery, RAMSEY COUNTY EXTENSION SHOULD FOCUS ON AGENCY COOPERATION AND REFERRAL:

I think your greatest support is going to be through collaboration with other agencies. They are going to say, "We need that [Extension] component. Who does it best? Ramsey County Extension, and it's going to be part of the [project]." ... and when you bring in support in that form, the commissioners are going to say, "[Extension] is important, and we are going to continue to do things with it."

I would agree that focusing with other professional services in the community is probably the best way to stretch your resources.

You first have to focus on getting [agency] people to know what you do, and then choosing in priority who you can work with to reach the most people.

I think that [Extension] will need a strong backup support to do collaborative programs with other agencies. I do think we'll have to do more collaborating with other agencies [in the future].

If that [program idea] is a major emphasis, and [Extension] is going to do it alone, then I'd have a concern. If they are going to do it in concert with all others, I think we are going to achieve more and get a better bang for the buck.

I think we need to look as a community, not just the Extension Service, at what is needed rather than going into competition [when we could] do coordinated kinds of things.

There has to be a community-wide effort to get the resources together that [workers with low-income families] need. Maybe [some agency] can be that coordinating place.

I think that there are some really good existing programs already doing that [function], so the task there would be referral.

I feel that I have become a better informed citizen of all the things available to low-income families. ... So, you're looking at being a referral service, referring to other agencies rather than trying to be all things to all people, when you know of things that are available to that group of people.

Participants also said that RAMSEY COUNTY EXTENSION SHOULD FOCUS ON DOING THE CURRENT PROGRAMS THAT THEY DO WELL --

I think that the Extension Service should continue doing the things that they do well and that they're so well known for and they are strong in.

When I think of the nutrition programs, the budgeting programs ... that I'm familiar with, Extension is really well known where nobody else can do them any better than they do. Those are the ones that I believe that they should continue to emphasize and should continue to be known for. I would like to see the Extension Service stay centered on what they do well rather than trying to expand into areas that are covered by other agencies.

And, finally, RAMSEY COUNTY EXTENSION SHOULD FOCUS ON DEVELOPING A MARKETING PLAN to inform the public and agency personnel about Extension:

I really see a need for the Ramsey County Extension Service to look at a marketing plan. I hear a lot of confusion [about what] all programs are included. First of all, [Extension should] become clear of what is the focus internally and [then] be able to express that through the different forms of media or through the people who are going to do the referrals into your program.

Identity is my first thought about what the Ramsey County Extension should focus on in the next two or three years.

Absolutely, the problem of marketing and image is a major issue or problem [for the Ramsey County Extension Service].

It was pointed out however, that Ramsey County Extension would have a problem if the marketing effort solved the image problem:

You realize [that] if you market well, you'll be a victim of your own success.

That's the problem. We get more publicity and get to reaching more people, there's going to be a need for more staff I'm sure because the agents are working to the limit.

If you're going to get more publicity out and expand the programs you have to complement this with an increase in volunteers and funds.

FUNDING CONSIDERATIONS

Funds for the Ramsey County Extension Service come primarily from three sources of public funds -- federal, state, and county. The federal government appropriates money to the U.S. Department of Agriculture for Extension work in the states. The federal funds and money provided by the Minnesota State Legislature are received by the Minnesota Extension Service through the University of Minnesota. The county contribution of approximately $200,000 in 1987 was allocated by the Ramsey County Board of Commissioners.

In order to determine how focus group interview participants perceived the value of the Extension program for people in Ramsey County, the following questions were asked:

> **Do you consider the expenditure of county funds for the Ramsey County Extension Service a WISE USE of public resources?**
>
> **Should the Ramsey County Extension Service spend effort to obtain private funds and grants?**
>
> **Should the program participants pay some portion of the expenses of their educational programs (e.g., a user fee)?**

VALUE AS EDUCATION FOR PROBLEM PREVENTION. The primary value of the Extension program cited was in the prevention of problems among Ramsey County youth:

> If you're working with youth, and keeping them out of the juvenile court system, [I feel that money is] well spent.
>
> I think the fact that the program is available to anybody in Ramsey County, and if you look at what the county is spending, ... we're reaching kids [and] people and keeping them out of other ways that the county is going to have to spend money on them [later].
>
> I'd rather see money spent on children than on jails. Of all the children I've worked with in 4-H going on 20 years now, none of them has been a bad kid. I think 4-H has done a lot for all of them.
>
> The kids did not have to turn to drugs. They could get their highs from their achievements in 4-H. I think that's kept them from hanging around on the street corner, and not...doing constructive things with their spare time.
>
> Our tax dollars tend to go to problem areas; you can spend it on positive [alternatives] to prevent crime.
>
> Saving money for the county is my point, and I think that's very positive.

I think the county is getting a pretty good deal for the money they're spending. ... based on what it might cost to incarcerate one person or one delinquent youth at $10,000 to $20,000 a year.

VALUE AS SUPPLEMENTING SERVICES OF OTHER AGENCIES. Agency representatives commented on the value of services provided by Extension to them and others:

[Ramsey County Extension] is a positive thing that eventually helps all the different programs that [the county] is funding. If the Extension Agents weren't available to help, the county would

have to increase the funding for other agencies. Because the services of the [county agencies] are all being intermingled, [the county] can't just pinpoint they are spending $200,000 [just for Extension]. ... [The County] is getting an awful lot of mileage [for their money].

We did a little cost figuring on what it cost us to put the video together [with Extension] as opposed to what it would have cost to hire someone to do so. Our estimate is [that it would have cost] approximately $10,000 to produce the videos that we produced if we had gone out and contracted for that service. We estimate that our costs were about $2,700--with $200 of that being materials, and the rest of cost was staff time which we figured 250 hours at an average of $10 per hour. We save three-fourths of the cost [by working with Extension]. That was a tremendous financial benefit to us.

VALUE OF DONATED EDUCATIONAL SERVICES. The contributions of Ramsey County Extension volunteers were noted:

You can't put a dollar value on [what the county receives from the Ramsey County Extension Service]. You can't say for $200,000 that we're getting a million dollars out of it. You're probably getting more than that [because] you're getting so much volunteer help ... you can't count that [benefit] because you don't know how to measure it. [The volunteers help strengthen people in all areas of their life.]

Right now there are 25 new [Master Gardeners] in Ramsey County. You can count on us to work 5 days a week, every morning starting in April through the end of September.

VALUE IN HELPING PEOPLE IN GENERAL. Participants identified ways that Ramsey County Extension had helped people develop as individuals --

We could sit here for hours and draw from people positive stories that have happened. ... Through 4-H, kids have grown up, and are [now] doing wonderful things. ... We come from a community, and I've learned to respect it; I've learned more about it through 4-H. I've grown up, and I'm a leader now, just because of what I did in 4-H.

The garden project on Larpenteur Avenue with the Hmong has been successful, ... They have [learned to] communicate [and compete] in the free enterprise system. They go out and sell their products in competition with [the local market gardeners] ... they're ambitious people.

As a county taxpayer, I think we're getting more than our money's worth.

[Ramsey County Extension percentage of the total county budget] is an interesting statistic. That's a small budget to support these county programs.

We try to put an economic value on some consumer questions that we get. ... It might be a stain on a rug, or it might deal with weatherizing a home ... those things can evolve to be a lot of money [saved] for a consumer.

Yes, [preparing an educational film for the Hmong community] was an appropriate use of an Extension Agent's time. We're talking about getting into the public arena with social problems, and certainly this is one of those areas.

PEOPLE ARE CURIOUS ABOUT THE EXTENSION BUDGET. Participants, however, had little or no understanding of program costs and where the Ramsey County Extension budget was spent:

It would be interesting to know how that $200,000 is spent ... in what categories? ... I'm sure that 90% of the budget is spent on salaries and fringe benefits ... As a taxpayer, that [information] would interest me.

Is this a contract service or is Extension an actual line item in the Ramsey County budget or are you a contract service within a department?

Has anyone ever broken down the county allocation of $200,000 as to how much that would be per household? It would seen to not be very much.

I would like to know how many people you reach.

How many are involved in your office? How big is the staff?

[Information about the funding of Extension] would be a good thing to get in the media, I think.

It's difficult for participants to understand Extension's structure because there are federal funds and county funds. ...Some of the Extension staff are county employees, some are federal employees, some are University of Minnesota employees, and some are University civil service ... that can be very confusing.

A LARGER BUDGET IS NEEDED. **Some participants felt that more funds were needed for more staff and more materials --**

> Personally, I think that the [Ramsey County Extension] budget is certainly not adequate. ...With a little more money, we could do a better job. ... They need to spend more.
>
> More para-professional staff [are needed]; we've been cut quite a bit and it wouldn't be a lot more money. ... I know that some of the [EFNEP] workers I've talked to are putting in full-time hours and not getting paid for it; there was a period of time when there was a very limited staff. ... When you talk about agent burnout, can't we get more program assistants, or if we can't [then] get more support staff? ... They need more staff there. They don't have enough to cover the areas [of work]. ... [If Extension gets more publicity], there's going to be a need for more staff I'm sure because the agents are working to the limit. ...I can't help think that if [Extension] had more money for another 2 or 3 staff people, how much more that program can be expanded with [the additional] number of volunteers that would be assisting.
>
> I have been involved with the resource development committee, and you get into financing and the source of financing these programs, it's just such a royal hodge-podge.
>
> I have found that the money hasn't been there to print literature ... I don't know how to get the project meeting sheets on science [that I need] ... there's just one copy for the county! ... We had a bunch of kids involved in this computer program, and they had a beautiful, nice book with the program all laid out from the younger kids all the way to the more advanced; the problem was that there was only one copy of the book in the whole family. So you get these kids, and an adult to get them involved and ready to lead, and there's no literature.

THERE ARE PROBLEMS WITH THE FEDERAL PORTION OF THE BUDGET. **Some participants pointed out the problem with receiving federal funds:**

> It's very difficult in dealing with federal funds. You don't always know when, if, and how much is going to be coming through.
>
> I knew that [EFNEP] was at half staff; part of this is because of the federal funding [of the EFNEP program].

SUPPLEMENTAL FINANCING STRATEGIES ARE BEING TRIED. **Participants noted the contributions of volunteers, and the potential of newer strategies such as charging user fees, seeking private grants, and linking with other agencies. As for the donated services of VOLUNTEERS:**

> Another thing that makes large sums of [tax] money look less awful to the general public is [to make sure] that they are aware of the number of volunteer people that are making [the Extension] program happen. What would be there if there were no volunteers when you have such a little bit of money? ... Another thing is sometimes

the volunteers are paying out money to be volunteers ... Has anyone ever done a study on how many volunteer hours are spent each week? ... and how many volunteers can be supported by one Extension Agent?

There are advantages and disadvantages in charging USER FEES:

We are charging user fees now [in 4-H]. ... Each kid is charged a $5.00 fee for the year to cover materials, and for that $5.00 fee they've basically got access to the whole 4-H program for the rest of the year. ... It's the same way with the Home Study Groups; the annual fee is $6.00 now. ... I think that we ought to be charging for other stuff or by the project they get involved in. The Master Gardener consumer calls used to be available for no cost if you called the University of Minnesota. Now that the University is charging $2.00 for use of the Dial-U Clinic, I tell callers [as a volunteer], "I can tell you this, but if you want to speak to a specialist, you will have to pay $2.00 which is a small amount to pay. You would pay more if you went to a doctor or a surgeon." I think that just by asking for $2.00, people have more respect for the educational service.

While the registration fee is minimal, I think that can get overwhelming too. It's one thing to talk to a specialist, but we were talking about low-income and ethnic families, and [a user fee] would scare people away if it got to be too much. ... There are some people that [a user fee] would be o.k. with, but there are some where [a fee] would damage your programming. ... If you start charging user fees, you're going to eliminate people who can't afford it; that's not fair because the research [from the University] should be available to everybody. ... I'm not calling the U of M [consumer information service]; I also resent that I have to pay 50 cents to talk to nobody [who I consider credible]. ... I hate to see some kids unable to participate in the program because they don't have the money to do it. ... It's a county program financed by taxes and you want to make it available to as many people as possible; you will eliminate some if you charge.

[User fees] mean more paperwork for somebody to keep it all straight; but it's better [having user fees] than not having them. ... Just collecting money from kids can be a real headache; you never get it sometimes.

Seeking GRANTS AND PRIVATE SUPPORT are other options for obtaining funds, but with some special considerations to take into account --

I think [outside funding] should be sought, but I think [Ramsey County Extension] needs to go about it in a professional way so the funding organization has an appreciation of what the Extension Service does.
You might have to get someone who has expertise in writing grant proposals to carry this out ... you might have to [hire] somebody

part time to do this or give a staff member who is there now time to do this.

I feel that organizations are being hit [for funds] by many other organizations at this point. We might as well get in there too, but we might not be successful.

During the 4-H Arts-In, we went to businesses in North St. Paul, and got good support because they knew who we were, and how valuable our services and our operation were. I think we have to decide, do we want them to know how important we are and how many good things we are doing? Or do we want to put our own feet on the pavement and find our own funds?

Maybe corporate contributions could sponsor this 4-H Club and their materials, or a small business could sponsor this group, similar to softball teams.

I wanted to say that Anoka County 4-H kids sold cookbooks and were advertising on TV all over the place. That was good public relations--even for Ramsey County.

Participants also foresee more LINKAGES between agencies and exchanging funds for services provided --

It seems like it would be more and more important in the future to work with agencies on a cooperative [approach]. I think money is going to be traded back and forth much more as the services get more specialized. People will be buying services from another agency. I think that work needs to be done to keep those avenues open, or those planning possibilities open.

We're going to have to expand on the linkage that we have formed [with Extension and develop it into] an ongoing relationship. Because money isn't available, we need to organize and communicate, work closely together and help each other, be supportive of each other.

<u>COST EFFECTIVENESS IS A FACTOR.</u> Participants recognized that cost-effectiveness is becoming an important criterion in funding public programs and that the measurement of costs and benefits is difficult to do --

I think the basic questions asked here are "How many people are you serving? What are the results and what are the benefits?" Are the benefits measurable in terms of how much you get for a dollar? I don't know how to do that, but that's the thing you have to look at.
It's important to continue to support the programs that are getting results instead of putting money somewhere else.

[Ramsey County Extension] needs to focus on impact versus the quantity of people reached.

Go back to those people who were users or receivers of the program and find out what happened.
It's hard to measure what rubs off [from 4-H]. Somewhere along the line it's going to spark something in that child that may be useful to him the rest of his life.

I think it would be very difficult to measure whether [Extension] is cost effective with youth.

Sometimes we get so concerned that with having more [numbers of] people, that we just do anything to get the numbers. I'm not sure that the educational value of what happens to get those numbers is as significant as working with 15 kids for six months on a special project where they've really gained something. But we also need approval, that it's o.k. to do that, by the powers that be.

I think that we need to explore how much programs actually cost. The Extension Agent's and secretarial time costs something, there are material [preparation] and mailing costs. You know that it's not free, it's just how [Extension] distributes the resources it has.

I get nervous running programs without a known budget. It isn't always the cheapest to do the one-on-one education when we could use the media to get the message out, but it takes some skill to do that.

<u>TWO-WAY COMMUNICATION IS ESSENTIAL</u>. Participants noted that those who allocate scarce public resources need to be kept informed about the Extension program:

We have to decide to show the government and the legislature that [Ramsey County Extension] is a worthy thing.

It was an interesting experience for me to testify [before] the Board of Regents regarding the funding for Extension.

I was pleased that I was able to provide assistance to Ramsey County knowing how important funding is. The policy makers need to know what we are spending the money on, that the money is very much needed, and [that the services and programs] are very much used and very much appreciated.

There are lots of $200,000 worthy causes [that the county could fund]. ...there are lots of small portions in the Ramsey County budget.

I think the problem that you're trying to address is, "How does [Ramsey County] Extension fit into the county's priorities?" I don't hear a lot of understanding [on the part of the Commissioners] as to what Extension is, what Extension does, how many people are served, and why Extension should be a budget priority.

As a person with a partnership with Ramsey County in another area, I might have some questions if I had to decide between two or three or four different programs. Which is more important? How [does my program] compare with a program serving the needs of senior citizens? Those are the hard questions that commissioners are going to deal with.

[The County Commissioners] may put other needs ahead of yours. ... If I were a County Commissioner and had to make those decisions, I would base [decisions] on what is best for the community at that time.

STAFFING CONSIDERATIONS

Prior to and during the focus group interviews, the Ramsey County Extension Service searched for and employed a Director as its first full-time administrator and County Department Head. Previously, the administrative functions had been performed by a County Extension Agent on a part-time basis. In addition, the Minnesota Extension Service wanted reactions to two ideas: (1) encouraging specialization in subject matter areas by the County Extension Agents, and (2) a "cluster" concept where an Extension Agent would work in two or more county programs in his or her specialty area(s). The questions asked of the focus group participants included the following:

1. How important is it for an individual staff member to have (or develop) an area of specialization?
2. How do you feel about the idea that Extension staff members in Washington, Dakota and other neighboring counties work together on area problems, and serve as a resource specialist to other counties?
3. What do you think of the idea that two or more counties jointly fund an Extension staff member's salary?

Concerns about other areas related to staffing emerged in the interview sessions. The area of volunteerism emerged as a major theme. Other commentary dealt with staffing needs and a positive appraisal of overall staff performance.

SHALL AGENTS SPECIALIZE?

THE PROS AND CONS. Some of the advantages given for encouraging County Extension Agents to develop areas of specialization cited were --

> In the Nursing Service, it's real helpful to have someone who knows more about a specific area so I don't have to know everything. I can ask another nurse ... she can tell me or give me advice.
>
> [Specialization] will allow someone to be a specialist in one area ... and really become familiar with the research.
>
> Specialists at the University are really, really hard to reach sometimes, so if we have somebody who is a liaison with a specialist and who can bring that information back to the community, I think it's a real strength. The University specialist doesn't have to work with each County Extension Agent [if agents were specialized].
>
> I feel comfortable working with one agent. I know [this person's] strengths and weaknesses; if I have something that he or she doesn't know, I'll go someplace else.
>
> Some of these subject areas are getting so involved and complex that to expect every agent to have a good working knowledge of all these different areas is really expecting too much of them.

[Specialization] is all right if the distances are short. I worked for a while in four different counties, and as long as you don't go beyond a twenty mile range, I think it would make some sense.

[I could see it working in the 4-H program] if there's an agent who specializes in a given area, be it demonstrations or whatever.

But, other respondents were not so sure that agent specialization was preferable to agents with general knowledge --

Sometimes it isn't a matter of what you have from your brain to your hand as it is to know where to find that information ... it seems to me that the general agents can have that knowledge of where to find the information that the consumer needs.

I think that each agent should be aware of the whole general field to a certain extent.

It seems to me you need a generalist. It's like getting down to the physicians that specialize. You have too few general practitioners anymore ... I think we would run into that same kind of problem with the agents.

Wouldn't you need a bigger staff if you were going to just specialize?

How does that work when we have specialists at the University for certain things? ... if we have specialists in the county, can they not cross over to anything else? ... maybe I'm not understanding how that will work.

If [specialization] is in addition to doing the 15 things [you are now doing] and you're expected to become a specialist in 7 more, then I would have a problem with it. ... I don't think you can stretch people quite that far.

Is specialization going to bring the people relief, ... make lives much less complicated ... or is it going to complicate [matters] further?

Sometimes you need to have a jack-of-all-trades. It's real hard for me as a mother; I have so many roles to play at my house, so when somebody says to me, "What is your specialization," my mind goes blank. I feel comfortable talking with different agents about the same thing because it's all happening in my home. In that sense, I feel [the staff] is already specialized enough.

<u>AGENTS ARE ALREADY SPECIALISTS.</u> Some participants felt that Extension Agents have already acquired specialized knowledge and competency in one or more areas --

They already are [specialists].

I think that is already happening; it's just knowledge of who does what, in what county, and [who has which] resources.

I've worked out of the Ramsey County Extension Office a lot, and I consider them all specialists.

Within the office, they've already designated who is a specialist in this and that area ... so there's already that recognition within the group ... it's already there because you go to certain persons for certain things.

I think [the staff] is doing a certain amount of [specialization] right now.

[Specialization] is really happening in [Ramsey] county ... I don't think it is any new notion in Ramsey County.

I think there's been some shared responsibility in the 4-H program, but I don't think there has been so much "specialization" ... that still has to be defined.

SOME CONSIDERATIONS. Some participants felt that certain conditions and practices were important to recognize if agents became more specialized:

I really feel that [the decision to specialize] has to be an internal decision ... It's not something that should be decided outside of them [the staff affected by the decision].

We've learned not only to specialize but to have 10 to 15% of our individual work time being called "flex time" ... [this time] would be available for general or developmental types of things.

[Specialization] requires more maintenance time for staff workers. It does require a lot more time for people to meet together so that they know what they each do. If you're going to specialize, and you want to have people use each other, you have to be willing to spend the time with the maintenance.

SHALL AGENTS WORK IN TWO OR MORE COUNTIES?

SOME SUPPORT FOR THE "CLUSTER" CONCEPT. Positive opinions were expressed about the "Cluster" concept where two or more counties would share an Extension Agent. But, in terms of the total, this was a minority position.

The arguments in favor of agents working in two or more counties were --

I would like to see more of that because we have programs going on in other counties near us that we are not necessarily aware of ... and the fact that we're welcome to participate.

I think [Ramsey County] has had experts from other areas do programs for homemakers. If you had to do all of those programs or write all those lessons, it would be insurmountable. I can see that it's really wonderful to share that kind of expertise ... one specialist could be really good, could have lots of time to get lots of information together.

In Master Gardeners, we've had speakers from other counties come when the agent felt that they could tell us something in greater detail than he could ... I think it could be worked out on a voluntary basis ... I'm sure this could be worked out, but I certainly would not want to see the [Ramsey County] job eliminated.

I've seen it work in rural areas, not ideally, but it's been a workable solution.

It's nice if you have a special need to [be able to] draw on that other county.

If we understand what you're talking about correctly, it's already happening.

There's been a certain amount of that doing on ... we've had agents from other counties talk to groups of leaders.

I think the communications across county lines needs to be improved. I think there needs to be more done ... whether that is done by sharing agents or whatever.

If an agent can develop a program for training leaders that can be used in three counties, it seems like that would be using his or her time wisely because a program has been put together that could meet the needs of more than one county.

On Century Avenue, there are just as many people living on the St. Paul or Maplewood side as there are in the Washington County side. If you want to move across the street, you're changing everything from your AFDC eligibility to your Medical Assistance eligibility; why have to worry about your Extension eligibility? Currently, I know they are exchanging experts in many of the Homemaker programs. ... and we're all invited to come to those program.

If it alleviated some of the duplication that happens in every county within 4-H where every agent does 15 different programs... if the agent could do 7 of those programs ... and do them with a larger audience ... and do them in the neighboring counties, then the agent could focus more time on fewer things and be less fragmented ... and do a better job with fewer things ... Someone from another county would be the resource to fill in for the 7 or 8 days [the agent spent in other counties].

OTHERS SEE PROBLEMS WITH THE CLUSTER ARRANGEMENT. **Other participants had reservations about the Ramsey County Extension Agent working in other counties --**

> On a special basis, maybe; but not on a regular basis. I think that if you had a person responsible for two or maybe four counties, then it would be too draining.
>
> They'd spend all their time on the road.
>
> I think it spreads them too thin though ... in a rural area you have so many miles between [activities] that you spend a lot of time on the road.
>
> The mechanics to make it work, the nitty-gritty is what would be really hard. ... ideally it sounds great, but I'm not sure.
>
> Unless the person lives in the county, I don't think that it will help the situation even if he knows the job real well, It takes a county agent who has moved here from another county a long time to learn about the county, the what's, the do's and don'ts ... let alone going into another county for a day or two.
>
> The continuity [that] one person brings for being there for all those years and knowing all those people, the contracts, networking ... you just can't build that up throwing a new person in for a year or two and then getting another one for a year or two.
>
> It may be very hard to have one person split up like that because there is too much to do.
>
> Well, I think you're going to have to hire about 4 or more Extension agents to do this.
>
> They don't have enough help.
>
> That's right, so you're going to have to hire that many more.
>
> You're not talking about eliminating any positions?
>
> It seems like funding [for staff salaries] already is fragmented.
>
> My opinion [is] that each county should make that decision rather than trying to make it a standardized system throughout the state ... I think each county has different needs.

VOLUNTEER STAFF HAVE A MAJOR RESERVATION. **The Extension trained volunteers expressed the strongest opposition to the idea of the Extension Agent who coordinates his or her program working outside the county. The right of access to the Extension Agent who coordinates the volunteer's program was stressed --**

I think the disadvantage is that people would probably become less able to identify with a given agent if they are working in two counties. [As a volunteer, you're working with] an ongoing program and it's being coordinated by one key person at the Extension Office. If you can't get back to that particular person, you get sort of lost in the maze, and nobody really knows if he's not there. I think [the agents] would be far less accessible to the people in their communities if that were to happen.

I think you [would] lose the closeness of getting to know someone well enough that you could go to them for any answer or problem.

We need to have continuity, we need to have at least one person that we can count on to be at least a general ... leader. ... they could call on a specialist to come in but I think we need one person who really knows [the program].

When you get down to having to know the people, when you get to that [point], then [clustering] doesn't work very well; that's an important part of whatever you're doing, you wouldn't be as good.

I felt that [sharing an agent among counties] was a problem in the rural area. We had two home economists for a 4 county area ... they were not always in the office on the day you needed them ... you had a closer relationship with the one that was assigned to your county than the other one, and you were more apt to take questions to the one that you knew.

That really helps kids to know they can call one person.

CONCERNS ABOUT THE EXTENSION STAFF.

The participants raised two additional questions related to improving the staffing of the Ramsey County Extension Office. They were: Do we have sufficient staff? and What can be done to improve the process of filling vacant staff positions?

CONCERNS ABOUT SUFFICIENT STAFF. The lack of staff in all categories -- Extension Agents, paraprofessional, and support staff--was noted by participants --

The biggest problem ... is that the staff keeps getting smaller and smaller, and then it gets shifted throughout the whole service ... I almost feel guilty calling [an agent] ... It's not just the money aspect; they start taking the staff people away.

I too agree that they don't have an adequate amount of staff out there [at the Extension Office].

When I call the Ramsey County Extension Office, they're all so busy ... they are so short on help. They need more staff there.

It seems like ... Extension agents seem to be very much overextended.

I think agents have more responsibilities than they are able to handle.

I can't help [but] think that if they had the money for another 2 or 3 staff people, how much more that program could be expanded with the number of volunteers that would be assisting.

We are advertising that we've got home economists or volunteers available to answer [consumer] questions, and yet we don't. We have one volunteer, one active volunteer, and home economists. We take messages for them. I feel ... that we may be losing that consumer contact ... if we aren't going to provide the service, then we should probably not advertise.

Opinions were also expressed about the need for additional program assistants:

I see these agents burning out after a few years; they could use more program assistants.

The EFNEP workers are so wonderful, I would like to see more of them. I know that some of the workers are putting in full-time hours and not getting paid for it ... there was a time when there was a very limited staff when I felt really guilty about calling over to EFNEP because I knew that they were at half staff ... and part of it is because of this federal funding.

Sometimes those [EFNEP] nutrition workers get stuck whether it should be their job or not. I think maybe [the staff situation] is relieved out in the Hmong community, but I used to hear [a Cambodian] get extremely frustrated when there was no Cambodian person he could call.

And about the needs for the secretarial/support staff as well --

When I hear it said that 100% of the secretaries' salaries comes out of county funding, it frightens me a little because they really don't have as much help as they need over there. ... I've helped a little when I've been there ... I've helped stuff envelopes ... and I know the secretarial staff is very, very short considering the amount of work that goes out of that office.

If we don't have a secretary for each agent, it's hard to coordinate that program because the other secretaries -- when [agents] have to share -- maybe don't know the complete program as well as they might.

CONCERNS ABOUT VACANT STAFF POSITIONS. This concern also emerged as a vexing problem. It was troublesome to some that a Horticulture Agent position had not been filled for at least six months --

We've been handicapped in that [Extension] has not had a Horticulture Agent for over six months; I think that has hurt us.

[If] you can't hire a new agent for six months, your program's on hold or just skimmed over for six months ... and then you have another six months before the new agent can take over.

I think that, in Ramsey County, there is a big need for horticulture. Yet the message that we provide when we have people walk in or when we get telephone calls is that there is nobody there. I think that if that goes on for a real long time, soon people will decide that it's not worth taking the time to call because there is nobody there to answer their question ... and if they come in [to the office], there is nobody there ... we say we have horticulture programs but yet there is nobody there to do the program.

CONCERNS ABOUT VOLUNTEER DEVELOPMENT AND MANAGEMENT.

The contributions of volunteers were cited frequently during the focus group interviews. Nationally, the Extension Service has a long tradition of extending the resources of its professional and support staff through a large cadre of volunteers. But things are changing in the volunteer sector, and participants considered it important to call to the attention of the Ramsey County Extension Service several matters that need consideration. The concern of the volunteer staff for having access to the Extension Agent who coordinates that program was identified above.

Volunteers assist with all major programs of the Ramsey County Extension Service: ANSWER-U (Consumer Education); Financial Management, Energy; 4-H; Master Gardeners; and Home Study Groups. In addition, volunteers have assisted with special projects such as for cable T. V. video tape production.

SHOULD VOLUNTEER DEVELOPMENT AND MANAGEMENT BE A PRIORITY? Are the recruitment, development and management of volunteer functions assumed by all Extension Agents as a part of their jobs or considered a priority goal of the Ramsey County Extension Service? The emerging literature on volunteer development and administration suggests the care and nurturance of volunteers should be major goals of organizations which use volunteers. Members in the focus group interviews would agree --

I'm coming from the volunteer sector, and I can't say enough about having a formal volunteer program. ... for example, the volunteer coordinator handles the recruitment, the placement, the recognition [of the volunteers]. ... it takes time ... to have [a] formal program, but you have a better all around volunteer who's going to stay with you, a better informed volunteer, and a happier volunteer. I think that's something that Extension should get more involved with -- coordinating volunteer resources.

I was wondering how many volunteer hours are spent each week, and ... if anybody has ever done a study on that. All of these volunteers have to be coordinated by somebody that is there all of the time. If you have 8 Extension agents, you can support so many volunteers; if you

have 10 Extension staff, you might be able to support even more volunteers.

EVERYONE AGREES THAT MORE VOLUNTEERS ARE NEEDED. But there are other issues to consider as well. It is becoming more and more difficult to recruit volunteers. What are good sources of potential volunteers?

Are you saying that even if you have more interest in this [program], you wouldn't be able to handle it under the present [volunteer staffing] circumstances?

We need more volunteers [with the ANSWER-U program]. It's almost impossible to handle more than 15 or 16 calls in an afternoon where you have to look up the information.

If you got more publicity [for this program], I am sure you would need more volunteers. Are volunteers still on three afternoons a week? When the program was started a year ago, we had volunteers for every afternoon, five days a week. Then [the number of ANSWER-U volunteers] fell back.

If you are going to get more publicity and expand the program, you have to complement this with an increase in volunteers and funds.

There's going to be a need for more [volunteer] staff I'm sure because the agents are working to the limit.

RECRUITMENT PROBLEMS. This problem has two major facets -- from the agency's perspective and from the potential volunteer's point of view. The agency problem was reported as follows:

We all know it is real hard to get volunteers from the community, and that's getting even tighter.

You can get kids who are interested in the 4-H program, but try to find adult [volunteers] to give leadership.

With everybody working, there are less volunteers than there used to be.
I see problems with getting volunteers to do all these things before expanding ... the staff.

As we get people more interested [in a program], how do we go about finding volunteers to work with them ... that's a definite thing that has to follow if you get the people involved; you have to have the volunteers to work with them.

The volunteer's perspective is just as important to consider --

Sometimes you feel like you've volunteered [beyond a reasonable amount], and you've had it. ... years and years have gone and what have you done with your life? I think sometimes we depend too much on volunteers; everyone likes to volunteer a bit, but there comes a limit.

[The difficulty in getting volunteers] makes us who are volunteering get more strapped to the band wagon and stay there because you don't dare leave. ... because you can't leave everybody else sinking.

I can't contribute any more hours as a volunteer than I do already.

Everybody is so strapped for time.

I am so busy volunteering [that] I haven't got time to see my own grandchildren.

It just popped into my mind that there may be benefits to [volunteering] but there's the time aspect [too].

I think that it's easier to get volunteers when they have a basis [a structure and materials] to [help them do] their work.

SOURCES OF VOLUNTEERS. Retired people were seen as a potential source of volunteers by the interview participants --

Your middle-aged people, I find, you can't even find anybody at home during the day if you call ... I think it's going to increase. There's going to be a problem with [finding] volunteers.

We will probably have to go to retired people [for volunteers] which would be marvelous. ... They certainly have a lot to offer.

I'm talking about things that the senior citizens can teach today.

Corporations now have formal retiree groups, and many of them are doing volunteer activities. ... The corporations love to get their name into new projects, so linking up with the volunteer sector in corporations [could be productive].

I retired from 3-M -- they have a retiree organization where you fill out a questionnaire [indicating] what your interests are, ... and they have a central clearinghouse.

R.S.V.P. does that too.

Many different companies have groups that register volunteers ... this would be a source for volunteers.

4-H needs to tap more into these different volunteer groups.

BENEFITS FROM THE VOLUNTEER'S PERSPECTIVE. There were words of appreciation from the volunteer staff members regarding their experiences --

I have lived in the Twin Cities area for 3 1/2 years. Last year I went to the Master Gardener's seminar and thoroughly enjoyed it, and have been quite active in that work since.

When I saw an advertisement for the Master Gardeners program, I hesitated because my experience and knowledge had come from mistakes I had made and the advice given through the St. Paul campus and the Extension Service. I can tell you that I am a very enthusiastic Master Gardener. I volunteer at garden centers, and am active with our Call Forwarding program. Since my husband has retired, we are very active with the community center where they have a senior garden, and I get lots of questions from church people and from my neighbors. It's only through the Ramsey County [Extension] program that I'm able to have this enthusiasm and knowledge, and I am very grateful for that.

I have learned by getting closely involved with the [Study Group] Home Council board and working on the ANSWER-U and Energy programs ... the more you get into it, the more you learn ...

I am aware of the financial counseling training that [was just held] for volunteers ... I think that the Extension Service is excellent ... in the way that they train.

HOW THE CURRENT STAFF IS VIEWED. Unsolicited comments about the effectiveness of the Extension staff emerged during the group interviews. In general, the staff enjoys a very positive image with program participants, volunteers, and representatives of county and community agencies --

I think our Ramsey County staff is extremely supportive to the public. They certainly are in the programs that we use.

[They] seem to be very available when you want them which doesn't always happen in all organizations.

When your [4-H] club is running into trouble, you can always turn to the Extension staff for guidance and help with other kinds of problems. They are always there, they are just a phone call away.

I know from when I worked at the Extension office on this volunteer program [that] everybody is just willing to help answer the questions that come in from consumers.

I can think of all of [those volunteers] over the last years who have done things for nothing but the gratis thank you. The staff, the same thing.

I think that the entire staff takes a personal interest in the work they are doing. So if someone walks in with a question and the Extension Agent isn't in, there is always a very pleasant concern [by the staff] that is very important. I've been in situations where I've walked in and they could care less that you were there ... you stand for a long time and nobody responds or if they do respond, they respond in a very gruff manner.

I think they're innovative in using the latest type of communication.

They tend to be a backbone, too, because [after] being out of 4-H for many years, [I] can just call up and they know [who I am]. ... they give you assistance. Their expertise too is really valuable. They can always answer a question; their referral is just fantastic.

We have some very conscientious people who put in a lot of extra time on different things.

I don't think anyone there puts in just a 40 hour week; it's a concern we don't have.

Having been to the Ramsey County Extension Service [Office] umpteen times over the past 26 years, I have yet to walk in there and see anybody sluffing off, goofing off. I say that with true conscience. I have never met a harder working group of people, ... that's from over the last 20 years of involvement on many levels as a consumer, as a volunteer, as a social worker, as a parent.

There's a little bell [that rings] as you walk across the threshold. [Laughter]

APPENDIX I

TELEPHONE PROCEDURE
PHONE CALL TO USERS OF RAMSEY COUNTY EXTENSION PROGRAMS

Hello! I'm _____. Your name has been suggested as someone who could offer valuable opinions in our Focus Group Interview process.

We're calling on behalf of our County Commissioners and the Ramsey County Extension Committee to talk with people about the Ramsey County Extension Service and its programs. You may be aware the Extension Service is preparing to go into restructuring at the state level, and it is the beginning of a 4-year program planning and strategic planning cycle. Focus group interviews with people like yourself will be useful to the staff and advisory committees, like the County Extension Committee.

We need to have about 8 people get together to talk in a group at each session with a person who is working with us from outside Extension. Two meetings have been set up for people like you -

A. USERS
(people who have used the Extension Service in the past - or who have been part of one or more of the programs.)

B. POTENTIAL USERS
(people who have not used the Extension Service - or if you did, you may not have been aware of what the Extension Service is or what it does in the metro area).

C. AGENCY/COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION REPRESENTATIVES
(persons representing county or community organizations and agencies; or persons representing selected aspects of county government).

These times have been set when staff and the room is available for this project. The group needs to meet in a room which meets certain conditions and has easy parking, is carpeted and away from noise.

You would have your choice of coming to either _____or _____session (that's _____days from now).

Each session will be about one and one-half hours in length, and you would be asked to respond with your opinions.

The Focus Group sessions are being held at Centennial Methodist Church in Roseville. The church is just east of Snelling Avenue at County Road C-2 (across from Paul's Place). It is north of Rosedale Shopping Center. Light refreshments will be served.

It's a very important opportunity - and we do need a firm commitment. If you can't participate, we need to find someone in your place.

Is it possible for you to participate? If so -- which session is more convenient?

(give and get details and record)

CONFIRM DATE, TIME, PLACE, SESSION LENGTH AND DIRECTIONS

The group will meet in the lobby of the church and go to the meeting room together for the session. Thank you!

APPENDIX II

INTRODUCTION FOR FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEWS

Good evening (morning) and welcome to our session. Thank you for taking the time to join our discussion on Extension out-of-school non formal education educational programs for residents of Ramsey County. My name is Harlan Copeland, and I am a faculty member in the College of Education at the University of Minnesota serving as a consultant on this project. I appreciate the assistance of Shirley Barber who is relieving me of the responsibility of running the tape recorder.

We have invited a number of residents in (agency personnel working in) Ramsey County to share their ideas about issues, concerns and resources pertaining to out-of-school educational programs in Ramsey County.

This is one of a series of sessions for residents and agency personnel to share their views and suggestions. We will be tape recording your comments because we don't want to miss any of your comments. It is helpful if only one person speaks at a time to avoid garbling the tape. Our discussion will last about an hour and a half.

We will be on a first name basis, and I've prepared name cards to help you remember the names of others in the group. Later, when we prepare a report, there will not be any names attached to the comments. You have our assurance of complete confidentiality.

We do not plan to take a formal break during the session. The rest rooms are _____ and the refreshments are located _____ _____. Feel free to leave the table for either of these, or if you just wish to stretch, but please do so quietly.

My last comment is that there are no right or wrong answers, just differing points of view. We are interested in all opinions.

APPENDIX II

QUESTIONS TO ASK
(Program Users and Volunteers)

1. I'd like to begin by asking each of you to tell us your name, where you live, and what your occupation is. I would like for you to tell us how you are involved with the Ramsey County Extension Service and have been involved in the past.

2. Thank you. Now I would like for you to indicate what kinds of things you feel that the Ramsey County Extension Service of the University of Minnesota, Minnesota Extension Service, is GOOD at.

   Probe Question: Are there any other strengths that come to your mind when you think about Extension?

   Probe Question: What do you feel is UNIQUE about the Ramsey County Extension Service when compared to other agencies?

3. If you were to describe the Ramsey County Extension Service in just a few words, what would those words be?

   Probe Question: What is the image that you think people have of the Ramsey County Extension Service?

   Probe Question: What could the Ramsey County Extension Service do that would impress people?

   Probe Question: Is there anything about the location of the Extension office or the facilities that should be changed?

4. As we tnink ahead to the future, are the educational programs provided by the Ramsey County Extension Service relevant and appropriate to the residents of Ramsey County in both the urban and suburban areas?

   Probe: Discuss until each area (Family Living, Horticulture, 4-H/Youth Development, Community and Natural Resource Development) has been addressed.

   Related Question: Are there any educational programs and services currently provided by the Ramsey County Extension Service which duplicate programs offered by other agencies? If so, is this a matter of concern?

   Related Question: What specific audiences should receive the highest priority from Extension? (Probe if appropriate)

   Related Question: Are there any educational programs which would be improved if Extension would work with other agencies?

   Related Question: Are there any programs or services that are provided by other agencies where the Ramsey County Extension Service could provide or assist with the educational component of the program?

Related Question: As the outreach unit of the University of Minnesota in Ramsey County, are the resources of the University being accessed effectively by Ramsey County through the Extension Service?

5. Now, we would like to hear your thoughts about how the Ramsey County Extension program might be financed. The 1986 budget was _____ which was provided by local, state and federal tax monies. The County portion was _____ or _____percent. The County contribution represents _____percent of the Ramsey County budget in 1986. How would you describe the VALUE of the educational programs provided by the Ramsey County Extension Service?

   Related Question: Would you consider the expenditure of county funds for the Ramsey County Extension Service a wise use of public resources?

   Related Question: Should the Ramsey County Extension Service spend effort to obtain private funds and grants?

   Related Question: Should the program participants pay some portion of the expenses of their educational programs (e.g., a user fee)?

6. Now let's think about what types of staff are best for providing the educational programs of the Ramsey County Extension Service. What do you consider essential in the hiring of new staff for the Ramsey County Extension Service?

   Related Question: How important is it for an individual staff member to have (or develop) an area of specialization?

   Related Question: How do you feel about the idea that Extension staff members in Washington, Dakota and other neighboring counties work together on area problems, and serve as a resource specialist in other counties?

   Related Question: What do you think of the idea that two or more counties jointly fund an Extension Staff member's salary?

7. We have talked about the future and the role of the County Extension Service in Ramsey County. Now, I would like for you to be very practical and think about the next two to three years. For our last question, what do you think should be the FOCUS of the Ramsey County Extension Service in an era of scarce resources, and where there are many public and private agencies serving the public? Or, to put it another way, what should the Ramsey County Extension Service concentrate on in terms of the audiences who are served, the kinds of educational programs that are offered, and the methods which are used?

8. I want to thank you all for participating and sharing your insights and suggestions. This information will be used by the Ramsey County Extension Advisory Committee as it works with the County Commissioners and the University of Minnesota to provide educational programs of quality which are relevant to the residents of the county. Thank you again.

APPENDIX II

QUESTIONS TO ASK
(Potential Users)

1. I'd like to begin by asking each of you to tell us your name, where you live, and what your occupation is.

2. Thank you. For our first question, I would like each of you to take a few moments and think about the last time that you needed some information. What was that experience, and where did you go for the information?

   (Invite group members to share that experience.)

3. We have just heard about several different sources where people get information to solve problems or to learn about something. In general, that are the major sources of information that are available to you in your community?

   Probe: Are there any county sources that you use?

4. Our lives and communities are complex today. I would like for you to think about your own situation and also that of your friends and others in the community. Listed on the sheet that I am passing around are four broad categories that affect almost everyone. Take a few minutes and write down any concerns, problems or issues that are important to you. I will be collecting these later.

   ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT **ENVIRONMENT AND NATURAL RESOURCES**
   HUMAN DEVELOPMENT **COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP**

   (Allow a few minutes for writing. Encourage group members to share topics; list on chart as reported.)

   Probe: Are there other issues or concerns that you have that don't fit these categories?

5. Of those issues and concerns which have been mentioned, which ones are most critical for the residents of Ramsey County?

   (Allow time for the group to rate the issue/concerns.)

6. Let's now take a look at these most critical issues. Of these issues and concerns, which will require information by Ramsey County residents to resolve the issue or solve the problem?

7. One source of information and education about these issues and concerns is the Ramsey County Extension Service. Should the resources of the Ramsey County Extension Service be directed to deal with these issues and concerns in this era of scarce resources and of many public and private agencies serving the public?

   (Listen to see if mention is made that (1) Extension is an educational agency; (2) Extension is supported by county funds; (3) Extension is the outreach unit of the University of Minnesota.)

8. If you were to describe the Ramsey County Extension Service in just a few words, what would those words be?

   Probe Question: What is the image people have of the Ramsey County Extension Service?

   Probe Question: What could the Ramsey County Extension Service do that would get your attention?

9. I want to thank you all for participating and sharing your insights and suggestions. This information will be used by the Ramsey County Extension Advisory Committee as it works with the County Commissioners and the University of Minnesota to provide educational programs of quality which are relevant to the residents of the county. Thank you again.

QUESTIONS TO ASK
(Agency Personnel)

1. I'd like to begin by asking each of you to tell us your name, where you live, and what your occupation is. I would also like for you to tell us how you are involved with the Ramsey County Extension Service and have been involved in the past.

2. THANK YOU. If you were to describe the Ramsey County Extension Service in just a few words, what would those words be?

   Probe Question: What is the image that you think people have of the Ramsey County Extension Service?

   Probe: Question: What could the Ramsey County Extension Service do that would impress people?

3. As we think about the future, are the educational programs provided by the Ramsey County Extension Service relevant and appropriate to the residents of Ramsey County including both urban and suburban areas?

   Related Question: Are there specific audiences that Extension should be serving to a greater extent than is now occurring?

   Related Question: Are there any educational programs which would be improved if Extension would work with other agencies?

   Related Question: Are there any programs or services that are provided by other agencies where the Ramsey County Extension Service could provide or assist with the educational component of the program?

   Related Question: Are there any educational programs and services currently provided by the Ramsey County Extension Service which duplicate programs offered by other agencies? If so, is this a matter of concern?

   Related Question: Is the Ramsey County Extension Service, as the outreach unit of the University of Minnesota in the county, being used effectively to access the resources of the University?

4. As individuals who also work with people in a variety of public and private agencies, how would you describe the VALUE of the educational programs provided by the Ramsey County Extension Service?

   Related Question: What are the UNIQUE things that the Ramsey County Extension Service has to offer Ramsey County citizens?

5. As you have worked with Ramsey County Extension Service staff members, how important is it for individual staff members to have (or develop) an area of specialization?

6. We have talked about the future and the role of the County Extension Service in Ramsey County. Now, I would like for you to be very practical and think about the next two to three years. For our last question, what do you think should be the FOCUS of the Ramsey County Extension Service in an era of scarce resources, and where there are many public and private agencies serving the public? Or, to put it another way, what should the Ramsey County Extension Service concentrate on in terms of the audiences who are served, the kinds of educational programs that are offered, the methods which are used, and the degree of cooperation with other agencies?

7. I want to thank you all for participating and sharing your insights and suggestions. This information will be used by the Ramsey County Extension Advisory Committee as it works with the County Commissioners and the University of Minnesota to provide educational programs of quality which are relevant to the residents of the county. Thank you again.

MINNESOTA EXTENSION SERVICE

ISSUES OR CONCERNS

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT: How to improve the agricultural system and other related areas of economic development specifically in agriculture, horticulture, energy production, fisheries, forestry, recreation, rural businesses and tourism.

ENVIRONMENT AND NATURAL RESOURCES: How to manage natural resources and economic activity with due consideration to conservation, productivity and environmental objectives. Specifically as it pertains to agriculture, air and water, fish and wildlife, forests, land use, recreation and tourism, and waste disposal.

HUMAN DEVELOPMENT: How to cope with rapidly changing social and economic structure that puts new stresses on family relationships, new demands on youth and their parents, and new concerns for the well-being of the elderly. Specifically as it pertains to: career and life changes, consumer and family resources, expressive arts and communication, housing and energy use, nutrition and health, safety, and vital needs of youth.

COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP: How to help people develop community leadership skills for the complex society of tomorrow. Specifically as it pertains to: changing communities, emerging leadership, participation in government, public decision making processes, rural restructuring, societal trends and concerns, and youth as a resource.

_____ Presented to and dicussed by 2 Extension non-user/potential user groups

APPENDIX III

DESCRIPTION OF GROUPS

Eight (8) groups comprised the Focus Group study project. Available county faculty and secretaries comprised group 1 who also served as the pilot group.

Group 1 - Served as pilot group and provided opportunity for staff (those available) to participate and offer own perspectives.

Group 2 - Extension volunteers and program users - 4-H, Home Study Groups, Energy Consultants, Food Preservation Consultants, Master Gardeners, former 4-H Junior Leaders (all were familiar with at least one Extension Program).

Group 3 - Extension volunteers - Home Economics video production, ANSWER-U, 4-H, Master Gardeners, and Horticulture commercial growers (all were familiar with at least one Extension Program).

Group 4 - Professionals in agencies: county government, media (including TV), community education, public housing, public health, community centers, ethnic community center (minority).
(Group included persons who were familiar with Extension or had cooperated with Extension).

Group 5 - Mixed group of volunteers and agency representatives including 4-H leaders who had missed the earlier sessions and asked to participate when called; others represented community agencies including refugee resettlement, a private foundation, public nursing service, low income housing in minority community and a private agency referral service.

Group 6 - Potential users of Extension (persons suggested as not having knowledge of Extension). Group included:

- a middle aged homemaker between careers
- a retired couple
- a mother of 2 children and living with her husband in mobile home court, employed and aspiring to buy a house
- a mother with young child who works part time
- a middle-aged man, single, employed blue-collar and homeowner
- a director of a learning center
- a minority male leader concerned about future of minority young people
- a young suburban homemaker with new baby
- a middle-aged professional male, homeowner in city

Group 7 - Potential users (persons suggested as having little knowledge of Extension).

- young single female, active on community board and media producer (radio)
- single parent (female) with teen boy, publication writer
- young homemaker in city
- administrator with law enforcement
- single parent with 12 year old, new homeowner
- pastor in central city (minority) church

Group 8 - Professionals with human service agencies, government, education, media and community groups

- administrator in a large volunteer organization
- community outreach coordinator, community college
- administrator of a library system
- administrator in human services organization
- media information provider
- nutrition educator
- pastor of a large suburban church with strong singles program
- special education resource person to 4-H
- writer for daily newspaper